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ILYA EHRENBURG

THE STORM

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STALIN PRIZE NOVEL

1947

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THE
STORM

A NOVEL
IN SIX PARTS



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PART ONE

: 1 *

SHVETSOV said to Vlakhov:

"I know it's not in your line, Sergei Petrovich, but I'd be very much obliged to you if you handled Roche aîné. We must talk seriously to Lancier. There's something fishy about that business. At first he hurried us, and now he is dragging the matter out."

Vlakhov was a new man—he had arrived in Paris only four months ago, but he knew French perfectly; when his colleagues expressed surprise at his excellent pronunciation he said, laughing: "But I'm a Parisian. . . ." His parents had lived in Paris for many years, had met and had married here; they went back to Moscow after the revolution. Seryozha was then seven years old.

Nina Georgiyevna didn't want the boy to forget his French and often spoke to him in that language. For some reason she had thought that her first-born would be a poet. Sergei was an enthusiast in many things—travel, engineering, the theatre, but he didn't write poetry. He had the elements of poetry within him though, he performed his work with ardour and was distinguished for a rare impressionableness. He made friends ardently and quarrelled with them ardently, went into raptures over things that others failed to notice and censured what others thought was natural. He was not ambitious and never tried to distinguish himself, but for all that he did distinguish himself in whatever surroundings he found himself. When he was a boy Nina Georgiyevna jestingly called him "my little Frenchman," evidently he reminded his mother of the city in which she had spent her young days, but Sergei lacked that inner serenity that lies hidden beneath the boisterous and glittering exterior of the French. He often acted rashly, rushed from one extreme to another; he was justly reproached for being thoughtless, but the blunders he committed tormented him, and he never tried to find excuses for himself; at twenty-eight he was still as naive and exacting as he had been in his adolescence.

The romantic period of his life coincided with the period of the collectivization of agriculture. He was then a shock-haired Young Communist Leaguer; he was sent to the Ukraine, where he argued until he was hoarse, travelled over humpy roads, thought in billions and, on the quiet divided his ration of a quarter of a pound of bread into two parts. The scar above his elbow was a souvenir of those times—of that autumn night when he was shot at. Then he went to the university, but even there he knew no calm—he was always in a hurry; and straight off from there he was sent to Kuznetsk—life in a dugout, up to the waist in mud, digging foundation ditches, lice, the dreamless sleep of the dead and wakefulness that seemed like a dream—daring plans, the variety and poignancy of human suffering, and towns, which rose up out of the steppe like fiery groves.

Sergei cherished a small photograph—that of a girl with a heavy plait wound round her head and kind yet stern eyes, like one of Turgenev's heroines, or a friend of Sophia Perovskaya's. It was a photograph of Nina Georgiyevna at the time she was released from prison. While working underground she displayed courage and selfless devotion. Later the burden of care for her sick husband and her children lay upon her shoulders. Her husband, a cost accountant by profession, was a man of abstractions; life appeared to him to be a symmetrical edifice, and he was put out when this or that detail that he accidentally came upon did not fit in with his lofty principles. He would mumble: "We cut the cloth, did our best, but look how the young people are tailoring it! Only fit for the spoiled goods exhibition. . . ." He died from consumption fifteen years ago; Nina Georgiyevna had to work very hard to bring her children up decently—Vasya, the younger son, was then eleven years old, and Olga was six. Nina Georgiyevna taught French at an institute and at school, and did translations at night.

There had been nothing dramatic in her life, she had lived on good terms with her husband, she loved her work, and yet she felt no satisfaction; at fifty-three she was still a dreamer, Sergei was not only her son, but also her friend, and with him she had long and frank talks. It seemed to her that Vasya was much too blunt, and her daughter's calculating mind frightened her. Sergei she regarded as the incarnation of her secret sentiments. She had never been jealous of her husband, but she thought sadly of the possibility that Sergei would fall in love with a young and, as it seemed to her, flighty woman, would cool towards his mother. She was glad when her son's infatuations passed off like a storm which had failed to burst.

When she learned that Sergei was being sent to Paris she was all of atremble: he would see the city in which she had spent the best years of her life, and this ought to draw them closer together; but she was vaguely jealous of Paris. On saying good-bye to him she said: "When you are in Montsouris go and look at a bench near the pond, the second

from the entrance, under the plane tree, father and I often sat there after we became acquainted." Sergei smiled and thought to himself-- "Mother forgets that that was thirty years ago."...

When he arrived in Paris he was amazed: before him was the very city his mother had talked to him about. No doubt the bench was in the place she said it was. . . . Sergei had gone through so much during his short life, had seen such things, that he did not believe in the possibility of repose. Was it so long ago that he had seen whole apartment houses being unceremoniously shifted from place to place in Gorky Street? Here it seemed as though human beings could not be shifted from their accustomed places. Centenarian ladies sat on benches wearing bedroom slippers. And that gentleman over there wearing a monocle-- why, he's the man that Maupassant described! . . . Everything seemed so familiar, and therefore unreal.

He had come to Paris from the Moscow of hard, stern years, his hair streaked with grey, exacting and distrustful. Moscow lived in the consciousness of an impending storm; and while the Parisians gave little thought to the agony of neighbouring Madrid, it was only recently that on cold, blizzardy evenings crowds stood gazing at a map of Spain displayed in Pushkin Square, and the silence of these crowds breathed anxiety, anger and confidence. Sensational court trials followed one after another: treason trials; and the reports of the court proceedings mingled with the tramping of German divisions on the Ring, with the wailing of Barcelona, with backstairs negotiations and military manoeuvres. Then came Munich. . . . In those years the people of Moscow lived in a state of tension and uneasiness, the climax was approaching. And after these stern Moscow nights Sergei saw life that looked like a merry-go-round at a fair--circling, flickering and glittering until it hurt one's eyes, made one's head swim. The city shone like a house where they were celebrating a wedding; it seemed that the people were not aware that death was lurking outside their windows. Similarly, anglers dozed on the banks of the Seine, lovers of Horace sneezed as they rummaged in the boxes of the second-hand book dealers, and similarly, itinerary singers sang at street corners about the love of Kiki, who was irresistible and yielding. Wait a minute, Sergei, is it true that nineteen hundred and thirty-nine is on the threshold, that there are ruins and graves on the other side of the Pyrenees, that doomed Prague is calling to its friends in its agony, that guns are being mounted on the Rhine? Perhaps Paris has taken leave of its senses, has forgotten to wind up the clock, has not torn off the leaves of the calendar for a long time? Perhaps a long-haired orator will emerge from a neighbouring café and call upon the romanticists of the Duchy of Baden, jointly with the blue-bloused workmen of the faubourg of Saint-Antoine, to plant the tree of liberty? Perhaps Hitler is the figment of the imagination of a score of unemployed cartoonists?

Then Sergei looked around: beneath this happy-go-lucky surface he discerned sadness; there was a touch of mournfulness in the very gaiety of the city; and the quips and jests, the ditties, even the whispering of loving couples suggested preparations for a journey, God knows where to. Paris dozed restlessly, it wanted to have its sleep out, come what may! . . .

This city attracted Sergei more and more strongly every day: he fell in love with the lustreless enigmatic Seine, with the pavements—now a greyish blue and now violet, washed by the frequent rains and reflecting a swarm of restless lights—with the cool narrow streets, the raw air that smacked of the sea, and with the profusion of flowers, beads, tears, the lugubrious gaiety of the crowds, which jested even when on the brink of death. he fell in love not with that beautiful, glittering Paris which caravans of tourists of diverse tribes inspected day and night, but with the grey, everyday, ordinary and yet extraordinary Paris.

His work left him plenty of leisure; he wandered about the city a great deal; and his work too took him to different factories where he met different types of people, burrowed into the depths of their souls and saw the reverse side of polite Paris society. Much of what he saw roused his indignation; he was conscious of having a different destiny, of his vital bond with a different kind of life, unintelligible to these people. The past few years had given the formerly confiding and easily enthused Sergei a touch of taciturnity and even of sombreness. And here he had to meet not only people who were alien to him, but also such as were hostile. He wrote to Nina Georgiyevna: "You will not believe it, but I have become a real diplomat! I smile when I want to punch a man on the jaw. I drink to the health of those who deserve to be hanged. There is much that is rotten here, but the city is wonderful, and I have taken a liking to the people." . . .

A man of about fifty, with a handsome but flabby face, like that of an old actor, entered Sergei's office. Lancier hesitated a bit and then, smiling in an embarrassed way, said:

"You must not be angry—Roche aîné is undergoing reorganization, but I shall take all measures to put the matter right."

Two days later they met again. Before the meeting Lancier had lunched well and had emptied a bottle of Burgundy. Suddenly he became reminiscent:

"In my college days I used to meet Russian émigrés. Very nice people! Once they invited me to an evening party. Monsieur Lunacharsky was there, and another man, a sculptor, whose name is very difficult to pronounce. . . ."

Sergei tried several times to turn the conversation to the business on hand, but in vain. Lancier felt offended:

"You think I am a businessman, don't you? That is purely accidental, the sober fruit of the rashness of youth. Why, I dreamed of becoming a poet, wrote verse, and one day. . . ."

Sergei frowned; Lancier muttered:

"Excuse me, I'm afraid I've got off the point. . . ."

But Sergei was again smiling a friendly smile.

"And so you are fond of poetry? It's pleasant to hear that. I dreamed of making the acquaintance of a man who was familiar with French poetry."

After that it was difficult to refuse the invitation: Monsieur Vlahov must really come on Thursday—some artists will be there, although there is really no art today—we are living in different times. . . . Moreover, Lancier would be happy to introduce the Russian guest to his family.

"We must get to know each other better; after all, our nations are almost allies. My partner is half-Russian and half-French. That is, he is a Frenchman now, but he was born in Kiev. His name is Léo Alpert, an exceptionally talented engineer. He left your country before the revolution, when he was still a boy, but he remembers his Russian. What a pity he is not in Paris now. My firm has been doing business with Russians for eight years now, and we have never had grounds for complaint against each other. Monsieur Petrenko often visited my house, he is in Moscow now, Monsieur Shvetsov told me that he has been appointed to a high post. Please give me another week—it's only a slight reorganization. . . ."

Maurice Lancier was one of the picturesque representatives of so-called "all Paris." Not many people had heard of Roche aîné, but everybody knew Lancier—he never missed a theatrical first night, or an opening day at an art exhibition. He worshipped art, and his suburban house Corbeille was like a provincial museum—Negro idols, ancient pistols, a what-not piled with old China. Lancier lived on a grand scale and gave suppers at Corbeille in candlelight. Surrealists, professors, and even a senator were among his guests. Lancier was fond of talking about the charm of country life, but when he lived in the seclusion of the country he found it dull—he longed for the lights of the city, friends and disputes. He weighed eighty kilos, but for all that his family doctor, Morillot, very aptly called him a "two-legged butterfly."

The son of a humble provincial haberdasher, Maurice Lancier left his quiet Niort for Paris while still a youth: his father wanted him to get on in the world. Maurice entered École polytechnique, passed his examinations by the skin of his teeth, and devoted all his spare time to poetry. He bought a hat with an immensely broad brim and, disdainng neckties, wore a Turkish scarf round his neck. With the money sent him by his father, who was concerned about his wardrobe, he printed the first and last issue of the magazine *Le Trèfle d'Hermès* which, in addition to his poem, contained an article by a young anarchist who later became a big cotton importer. The young women liked

Maurice, but he was very shy and did not go beyond verses, or furtive kisses.

At a ball given by a certain Madame Lefort who was reputed to be a patroness of the arts, he made the acquaintance of the daughter of a factory owner named Roche. It couldn't be said that Marceline was good-looking, but she possessed the charm of naturalness and individuality. She despised her father's acquaintances, her relatives and the people of her own age because they worshipped money; she lived alone, in a world of fancy. Lancier touched her by his superficial but sincere fantasies, his love of poetry and his unselfishness; she fell in love with him. Roche was emphatically opposed to their marriage; not satisfied with admonitions and curses, he locked his daughter up in his suburban villa. Shortly afterwards, in the middle of the night, Marceline burst into the humble room where Maurice lived, hatless, dishevelled, and wearing somebody else's dress that was much too long for her. Maurice was both overjoyed and frightened; he kissed the girl, and between the kisses he urged her to return to her parents—he was a sentimental fellow, but weak-willed. It was Marceline who settled everything: she hung her dress on a nail and stayed; next morning she ran out for the bread and milk, as if she had been doing this all her life. At last Roche was obliged to yield—she was his only daughter, and when his wife told him that he would soon be a grandfather, the old man softened and became reconciled with the “ne'er-do-well.”

After graduating from the institute, Lancier began to work at his father-in-law's factory, stopped writing poetry, and was gradually drawn into the business. A year later the war broke out. Lancier regarded himself as a faintheart—he was afraid of his father-in-law, of gossip, and of the customers. But he turned out to be not a bad soldier and was awarded the Croix de Guerre. The war remained in his recollections as something exalted; he not only forgot the mud, the lice, the zooming of the German “valises,” but even the death of his comrades. All he remembered were the beautiful moments—his regiment marching into Lille and the girls pelting the soldiers with flowers and kissing them. *La Presse* publishing a portrait of brave Sergeant Maurice Lancier, the lark singing in the field a quarter of an hour before the attack was launched. . . . Lancier was convinced that there would not be another war, just as he was convinced that nobody could now write poetry, or fall head over heels in love—he was of the opinion that all that he had experienced could not be repeated.

Shortly after the armistice Roche died. Maurice became the owner of Roche aîné. He was conscious of his responsibility towards his wife and children and tried to be sensible. But he could not cast off his happy-go-lucky nature, his fondness for a gay and glittering life, his numerous whims. But Roche aîné kept on running—the machines rattled as before, in the office curly-haired typists copied

invoices, and customers said respectfully: "An old and well-established firm."

During the crisis Roche aîné was on the verge of bankruptcy; it was saved by Léo Alpert, who had made money in America by selling a patent; he became Lancier's partner. The new difficulties began shortly before his meeting with Vlachov—Chimie-Nord crashed, and Lancier lost a fairly large sum of money. He had to do something about it—either sell Marceline's estate, Gelinotte, or accept the offer of a certain Gaston Roy. Lancier was indignant: how could he let a stranger into his house? Would not such a "reorganization" be tantamount to suicide? But he soon brushed the unpleasant thought aside—he had a habit of soothing himself. "Why suicide? . . . The pie is big enough to stand cutting up into three parts. Alpert didn't gobble me up, why should this fellow Roy do so? Alpert is an engineer, but this Roy knows nothing about the production side. . . . It would be silly to sell Gelinotte—say what you like, land is land. The Loire, the vineyards . . . and what a park! What pearls! And besides, it would mean robbing poor Marceline. . . ."

Lancier could not concentrate his mind on one thing for long; suddenly he remembered: "Mado has painted a beautiful landscape, she has real talent, even Sembat praised her. . . . But I'm worried about Louis—the boy is determined to become an aviator. It's an amazing generation—we flew on Pegasus, they must have engines . . . materialists! But Louis will change his plans a dozen times yet. . . . I'm so pleased Marceline is better, the waters have done her good, she looks splendid. . . ." And forgetting all the unpleasantness, Lancier smiled.

He was an exemplary paterfamilias; now and again he would be infatuated with some woman or other, but he soon put a curb upon himself, fearing to hurt Marceline. He worshipped his children—pretty Mado, who had inherited her father's passion for art and her mother's wilfulness, and his son Louis, the tall, easy-going, merry youth, who was taken up with sport and could not read a single book to the end.

Behind the eccentricity of Corbeille that was so striking to visitors, there was the ordinary family, happy and unhappy. Marceline had long ago withdrawn into herself; her husband's joys seemed to her to be paltry and sometimes ridiculous. Louis was too energetic, too ambitious for the toy paradise of Corbeille—Mado lived in a world of fancy, and when any pettiness of life, some misshapen detail, drew her attention, she would say to herself: "If only I could go away, fly, escape from here! . . ." But love bound these people who inherently were strangers to each other, and on meeting at the dinner table they were obliging and solicitous. The family was kept together by Maurice Lancier, by his mildness, geniality, inexhaustible cheerfulness. He would flare up quickly, but would quickly calm down and, laughing at himself, he would say: "I got a bit heated. . . ." He disliked politics and never

allowed disputes at his house that would mar the friendliness of the gathering. When a friend wanted to reveal to him the tragic conflict of classes, parties and states, Lancier would answer: "That's all true, but don't forget that ours is—the land of reason. In this country even madmen are logical. I assure you that even our lunatics are—typical Cartesians. That horror will never reach us. Believe me, mon cher ami, never. . . ."

After this conversation with Vlakhov, Lancier sat and pondered. "That Russian order must be delivered. I can't understand that Roy. . . . Everything cannot be reorganized in two weeks! And besides, why does he interfere? I haven't given a definite answer yet. It's a pity Alpert is away at a time like this. . . . But then, Alpert knows nothing about finance, he is a good engineer and that's all. . . . But that Roy is not even an engineer. Where on earth did he come from? . . . I don't like his face. . . . But he is not engaged to Mado, why should I worry about his face? The main thing is to keep calm. That Russian is a very nice fellow; I never thought there were Bolsheviks like that. . . . Perhaps people are human everywhere. Was I made for Roche aîné? If you saw a man naked you would not be able to tell his origin, profession or his mode of thought. It was like that during the war. . . . In the same company we had Chalet from the Banque Indochine, and poor Jacques, who used to pick up cigarette butts on the boulevard. But what friends they were, nothing could part them! Later on, I suppose, one went back to his stocks and shares and the other—to his cigarette butts. . . . It was such a war that everybody forgot who you were, or where you came from. . . . And why does that Roy keep on talking about another war? Louis will go into the Air Force. . . . Madness! . . . There will be no war, nobody could stand another war. People want to live in peace. Reorganization—of course, that's only a nice way of putting it; I shall have to put up with it. I will have to yield. But what else can I do? I am fifty-four, and I'm tired. Let that Roy come in. . . . But there's one thing nobody can take from me—peace of mind."

* 2 *

Lancier was pondering over whom to invite for the dinner he was arranging for Vlakhov. He wanted to invite Nivelles—that would give the evening a poetic touch, but he was afraid of collisions. Nivelles was a nationalist, and he detested Communists. . . .

Nivelles was a lean, jaundiced individual. In his own small circle of connoisseurs of pure poetry he was known as the author of the book *Le Masque de Circé*. He held a rather high post in the Prefecture of Police: many of his colleagues had no suspicion that the Chief of the Passport Department sat up nights, his gaze concentrated on one

spot, moving his lips and scribbling something on scraps of paper. Nivelles was bored by his work at the Prefecture, but he had no other means of existence—his books did not sell, and his aunt, who was to leave him a small legacy, was happy and cheerful in spite of her three-score-and-ten and never even caught cold.

Nivelles could be an ornament at any dinner table. Still, Lancier hesitated. Those damned politics! He even went to his wife for advice; she answered:

"Better invite them on different days."

But Lancier became obstinate:

"Nivelles is a poet. Let that Russian see that I am neither a Left nor a Right, but an ordinary Frenchman. All right, I'll invite Lejean. He is not simply a Communist, he's a super-Communist. As if I don't know who organized the strike at my plant in 1936! But for me Lejean—is a splendid engineer and a man of culture. If everybody has taken leave of his senses does that mean that I must go mad? No! No! I am fifty-four, and they can't remould me. Whom else shall we invite? Professor Dumas, Sembat, of course. That's enough.... Wait, long ago I promised the professor to invite one of his protégés.... Just a moment. I wrote her name down somewhere.... Madame Anna Roth.... I think she is a Czech. Or perhaps she is from Hungary. I don't remember. She fought in Spain, but don't worry—she's a very nice woman. I saw her at Dumas' several times. And the Russian will be pleased to meet her...."

At the door he stopped:

"Perhaps we have invited too many Communists!" He chuckled.—"You see, Marceline, they have infected me. Why this careful dosing? One would think I was forming a Cabinet, but I'm only arranging a modest dinner...."

Lancier loved to show his guests the sights of Corbeille; he opened cupboards and dragged out ancient weapons, engravings and snuff-boxes, lit up the pictures on the walls, and then took the guests into the park, commenting as he went along: "American elm... Roses de Noailles... a Sudan goat...." He was glad of the new visitor, and he drew Sergei's attention to the Negro Kinglet's tambourine and to Talleyrand's autograph. Even the rain did not stop Lancier—how could he refrain from showing the Russian the Sudan goat?

The other guests too were obliged to express admiration for things with which they had been long familiar. But they readily forgave Lancier his weakness; it was not often that one met good people who could entertain friends as well as he did. Lancier often said: "Madame Curie or Renoir could afford to give their guests even over-boiled beef and dry potatoes. But what is Maurice Lancier?... My presence alone can't give anybody any pleasure. Except Marceline, perhaps...." On the bookshelf over his bed, where Lancier kept

his favourite books, among slender volumes of verse, one could find a cookery book heavily underlined, and the dinners with which he entertained his guests showed that he had not studied the culinary art for nothing.

There was another reason why the Villa Corbeille seemed to be an oasis: the host's serenity infected the guests. And in that year nobody spoke of anything but the impending war; and although few believed this talk, the constant repetition of the phrase "it will break out soon" upset even the most imperturbable people.

"Rain, rain again"—grumbled the artist Roger Sembat, and shaking himself, he stared moodily at the long streaks of water; then he picked up a newspaper and muttered angrily: "Again about war.... The Germans are threatening, and our people pretend that they are not afraid. If we didn't fight for Prague, who will go and fight for Danzig? Idle talk!..."

That crank Alpert (this was before he went away) said: "Do you want to know what Paris has been agog with during the past twenty years? First it was 'the end of the last war,' 'eternal peace,' men's suits with padded chests and tight waists, foxtrot, Paul Morand's stories *Ouvert la nuit*, the Bolshevik 'man with a dagger between his teeth.' Then came crossword puzzles, reparations, the Mulatto Josephine Baker drives Senators crazy, Citroën's illuminated advertisement on the Eiffel Tower, the jeweller Mestorino murders a stockbroker, and the Oustric scandal. After that came the crisis, the perfumer Coty—the 'friend of the people,' the taxi girls, Mademoiselle Violette Nozière poisons her father, the Staviski scandal, young madcaps set fire to motor buses on the Place de la Concorde, ladies dye their hair violet, official opening of the brothel Maison Moderne bearing the ancient name of 'Sphinx,' psychoanalysis, the surrealists, strikes, even gravediggers go on strike. Then talk about war, first night of Giraudoux's *There Will Be No Trojan War*, trial blackouts, Munich, illuminations. And again talk about war.... It is time to change the subject, far better talk about the super-surrealists, or another Violette with arsenic...."

Evidently, the newspaper men were of a different opinion: every day one could read about the impending war. How pleasant it was to escape from the croaking of the newspapers by going to Corbeille where, if there were any arguments, it was about who was better—Paul Claudel or Paul Valéry? If there was any disagreement it was only about the appraisal of the different modes of preparing pig's trotters. It was enough for a guest to mention the Czechs, the Poles or the negotiations in Moscow, for Lancier politely, but firmly, to turn the conversation to the latest first night, to the beauties of Savoy, or the weather—when will ~~the~~ intolerable rain stop? There would be no war, but nobody was in a hurry to go to the mountains, or the

seaside—it would be dull sitting in a hotel and watching intrepid sportsmen bathing in the pouring rain. . . .

“You are not afraid of rain, are you, cher ami?” enquired Lancier.

Sergei answered with a smile:

“I love rain. It’s jolly! . . . Summer rain, of course—noisy and bubbling.”

Then Mado said with an irritation that surprised herself:

“So there are prigs in Moscow too!”

Lancier glanced at her reproachfully: how could she offend a guest?

Sergei made no reply. Mado’s face and deportment interested him. Their eyes met. When Sergei was surprised at anything he would throw his head back and screw up his large grey eyes; at such a moment his face, usually thoughtful and mild, bore a haughty expression. “Why does he look at me so superciliously?” thought Mado to herself. “Does he despise me? But what for? He has not even spoken to me. . . . They must despise everybody. Lejean said recently: ‘There is too much rot here.’ . . . Well, I can despise too! But he has a fine face. . . . Or is it a mask? . . .”

Mado tried to keep her eyes off Sergei but she kept glancing at him in spite of herself. As if deliberately, their eyes met every now and again. When that happened Mado blushed and said something biting. Her father wanted to show his guest her still lifes, but she protested:

“Why trouble Monsieur Vlakhov with rot?”

Lancier then showed his collection of old faded photographs—Verlaine with a glass of absinthe in front of him, Zola in an antediluvian automobile. Sergei said:

“Have you any photographs of yourself in your student days?”

“He’s pulling father’s leg”—thought Mado. Lancier was as gleeful as a child; he took out a whole pile of photographs; they showed an inspired looking youth wrapped in a cloak with some ruins in the background. Sergei involuntarily glanced at his host. Lancier smiled:

“No, they’re not like me now. Thirty years—is no joke.”

When they sat down to dinner Lancier anxiously glanced at pale-faced, silent Nivelles. But the poularde was really a success, and what with the old Burgundy, it had its effect: Nivelles livened up and some colour diffused his face. Lancier listened with pleasure to the discordant hum that usually follows the conclusion of a successful dinner.

Nivelles was saying:

“Art lives on the exceptionalness of events, images, feelings. If I feel what millions of others feel, it is above all uninteresting.”

“In my opinion, there must be nothing exclusive in art”—objected Roger Sembat. “Flaubert, I think, intended to write a novel in which nothing happened. It is a pity he didn’t write it. Bonnard paints

an arbour, Marquet—a stream with gudgeons, Utrillo—a side-street in a faubourg. But in Switzerland the artist has nothing to paint—glaciers are not for art. Your 'exceptional feelings'—are like the Alps. If mankind ever gains wisdom, it will cease to interest itself in the exceptional. Take the newspapers—what do they write about? Scandals, murders. Now a fellow named Hitler is the exceptional psychopath. Far more interesting is the fact that the wistarias are in bloom, that my milkwoman Lucie has married, that we have milk, fields, Renoir. . . ."

"In that case, you ought to like Soviet society, there can be nothing exceptional there. For a collective, genius—is an impermissible misprint. And they have first-class proofreaders. . . ."

Lejean intervened:

"You put too much trust in simplified formulas. Monsieur Nivelles. Take Germany. There they worship the cult of Nietzsche. But if we take a good look at their 'mountain peaks'? Where are they? A flock of sheep—and nothing more. The word 'collective' frightens you? I've not been to Russia, but I'm convinced that the collective needs real men, not nonentities."

"A collective—is a well-mown lawn. Beautiful, but monotonous. Everything outstanding is leveled out. Flaubert, whom Monsieur Sembat mentioned, wanted to write about the ordinary, but he wrote in an extraordinary way. In Soviet Russia they write about ordinary things in an ordinary way. There there is not, nor can there be, a Flaubert, or even a quarter of a Flaubert. You will say. . . ."

"I will say, first of all, that there is not even an eighth of a Flaubert in France today."

"Yes, but according to what you say, France is decaying, while Russia is in full bloom."

"When a tree is in bloom it does not yet bear fruit."

"I am afraid it is bearing fruit, but bad, wild fruit. Perhaps I'm wrong. If our Russian guest corrects me, I shall be glad to admit my mistake."

Nivelles said this with exaggerated courtesy, barely concealing a mocking smile. Sergei, however, kept calm.

"I am ignorant in these matters. You—are men of art, I am an engineer. Like Monsieur Lancier. Only I never wrote verse. . . . Perhaps you are right when you say that we are not yet astonishing the world with our art. We have not had the time. . . . But we are astonishing the world with something else—by the fact that we exist. You don't go into heated arguments about English art or German art, you argue about ours, and it seems to me that you are not arguing about art, but about our existence. I often notice that people here, and clever people at that, do not express their own feelings, but repeat stock-phrases—a culture of quotations. It may sound funny to you, but we

have our Juliets, only they do not know how to express their love. Judge for yourselves. What is better—a real Juliet who cannot express herself, or a feelingless shadow who repeats monologues from an ancient tragedy?"

Mado raised her slender eyebrows and said in a loud voice:

"All we can do is to bow down to the mute Juliets and postpone art to the thirtieth century."

"Wait, Mado"—said Lancier, getting nervous—"why do you talk like that? The Russians have shown that they can build very quickly. . . ."

Professor Dumas backed him up:

"And not only build. I have met young people from Russia. They are the children of peasants. Perhaps they are not able to write as well as our friend Nivelles, but they can think. They can. . . ."

He was interrupted by a good-looking though sickly woman who had not uttered a single word up to now:

"They know how to die. I have seen it. . . ."

"Where?"

"In Spain."

For a moment all remained silent. Then Nivelles said:

"Frenchmen know how to die too. Monsieur Lancier can tell you that—he remembers Verdun."

"We can't live on history"—objected Lejean—"I will tell you what is the most bitter truth: sometimes it seems to me that Frenchmen have forgotten how to die. They don't want to sacrifice anything they are afraid of losing their repose. I remember the evening when the report came about Munich. What rejoicing. . . ."

Nivelles got up, crumpling his serviette.

"I detest demagoguery. Only cowards and idiots could rejoice then. Munich was an appalling tragedy. But if the Communists were in power, they would have done the same. Do you think the Russians will fight? Demagoguery! And besides, they can't fight—nobody has yet stopped tanks with leaflets. The Bolsheviks will surrender half of Russia to Hitler to save themselves. . . ."

Lancier saw the calmness of the gathering collapse. Everybody was shouting, nobody was listening to what the other was saying, not listening even to the host, who was trying to allay the passion. But when Sergei spoke the disputants fell silent.

"Nobody wants to fight. Except the Germans, perhaps. . . . But you were wrong in what you said, Monsieur Nivelles. . . . Perhaps I know nothing about art, but I know my people, our people will not surrender. If we are attacked, we shall fight, and fight so that it makes you frightened to think of it. . . ."

He stepped aside and stood at the window. It was still raining as hard as ever. The guests retired to the drawing room: there Lancier suc-

ceeded in turning the conversation, and Sergei heard somebody say: "Giraudoux's dialogue is brilliant...."

Mado went up to Sergei and asked him softly:

"You are thinking about your country, aren't you?"

"No, I was thinking about something else just now. Not long ago I read a book on the history of Byzantium. Do you know what the Byzantians were doing when the Turks approached the city? They were arguing about which chariot would win in the races—the red or the blue."

"Why are you interested in our fate?..."

"We have a common enemy. And besides..." After a moment's pause Sergei added: "I haven't been here long, but I have fallen in love with Paris..."

She was touched, she wanted to take this man by the hand and tell him that there were real people here, too, that he must not judge her by the spiteful and silly things she said, that she felt very sad, and that in another minute—she would burst into tears.... But instead she said coldly:

"They are waiting for you in the drawing room, coffee has been served there."

At that moment the footman announced:

"Monsieur Gaston Roy."

Lancier had not told his wife that he had invited to Corbeille the man of whom he was constantly thinking: he was afraid to tell Marceline about his troubles. Yet he wanted to see what impression his prospective partner in Roche aîné would make upon his friends. He expressed his dislike for Roy by inviting him to come after dinner—"to have a cup of coffee."

A rather short man with a clipped, faded-looking fair moustache entered the drawing room; his carefully combed-back strands of hair failed to conceal his baldness. Lancier proceeded to introduce the newcomer; when they stepped up to Anna Roth, she said:

"I am acquainted with Monsieur Roy."

The guest appeared not to have heard these words, although they were uttered loudly enough, and he introduced himself. He paid an awkward compliment to Mado, tried to start a conversation about Maurice Chevalier and then about financial policy, but nobody supported him. Those pauses in the conversation occurred which indicate that it is time to disperse; and Gaston Roy had scarcely time to drink a cup of coffee when Sembat got up; he was soon followed by the others.

Dumas went off with Lejean. Sergei offered to take Madame Roth home. The last to leave was Gaston Roy. Lancier was conscious of a feeling of relief when he was gone. But Louis, unwittingly, upset his father:

"I like that Russian, I have never seen a live Bolshevik before. I know nothing about politics, but one can easily see that they are a

firmer lot than our radicals. As for that Roy—he's downright vulgar. Where did you dig him up?"

Lancier was amazed by the fact that Louis had asked him the very same question that had been haunting him for a long time—indeed, where had that Roy sprung from? . . . He mumbled:

"I have business dealings with him, he is the Economic Information Agency. . . ."

No more was said about Roy. But Lancier continued to think about him. It was quite evident that his future partner had not been to the liking of his guests and had broken up the party an hour before they would ordinarily have gone. Yes, he is vulgar. . . . But what could he do? . . . Partners can be chosen when there is a free choice. Perhaps he ought to tell Marceline all about it? She will say: "Sell Gelinotte," and once Marceline says a thing, she will insist on having her own way. Everything will be settled very simply. Is it essential to own an estate? They could go to Normandy for the summer. Yes, but that would mean robbing Marceline, depriving the children of their inheritance. Roche aîné may go bankrupt. But real estate—is real estate. Why give way to momentary weakness? Vulgar? What of it? They need not visit each other. Everybody's vulgar in business. But they would have Gelinotte. . . . He had judged that Russian rightly from the first words he had uttered. And all had ended well, even Nivelles had admitted that Vlakhov makes a good impression. And the poularde simply astonished Nivelles. . . . A splendid recipe! And forgetting about Gaston Roy, Lancier said to Marceline:

"The dinner was a success, don't you think?"

Marceline smiled that sad smile which always lent her charm; she recalled how young Maurice had asked her with the same naive pride: "This poem is a success, don't you think?"

Lancier went up to Mado:

"You don't like that Russian, do you? He is a nice fellow in my opinion, and behaves well. . . ."

"I don't think so. I don't think I've ever met such smugness before. Infatuated with his Juliets. . . ."

"On the contrary, he spoke with great restraint. But why are you so heated about it?"

"Not a bit. . . . After all's said and done, it's all the same to me—Vlakhov or Roy—they are your business acquaintances. I'm going to bed—I've got a headache. . . ."

* 3 *

In the motley company at Corbeille, Sergei and Anna had at once felt a mutual sympathy for each other: this is the way two ships, sailing under the same flag, meet in the open sea. They understood each other

without having to say much, and yet it was difficult for them to understand each other, because their lives were so different.

The taxi driver stopped and asked what turning to take: this was on the Place Falguière near the little hotel where Anna lived. She said:

"If you're not tired, we can go in and have a chat. . . ."

They entered a small café that was patronized only by the inhabitants of the neighbouring streets, with the inevitable, in such establishments, fat, hairy-lipped hostess, the tomcat on the cash counter, and two cranks, ready to argue half the night about where the best fishing is to be found—on the Seine or on the Marne? and which liquor has the better aroma—Burgundy or Savoy?

At first the conversation between Sergei and Anna was rather disjointed, each talked about his or her particular interests; it rambled from the Moscow Metro and the demonstrations in Paris to the Agricultural Exhibition and the reign of terror in Prague. Then Anna began to talk about Spain:

"We had a splendid Bulgarian in our brigade. When we were surrounded, he led us to the coast. He sang well. . . . We had Germans, Frenchmen, Yugoslavs, Czechs and Hungarians. When we went into action, we sang the 'Internationale' in ten languages. Isn't that wonderful? Sometimes I think that Spain was the epilogue. . . ."

"Why? It was the—prologue."

"It was like the old days there—like the tales about the revolutions in the last century. There was a lot of naiveté, purity, and a lot of stupidity, too. Can this happen again?"

"No, it will be less romantic, more serious next time."

"One of your Russians often said to me that the struggle was an unequal one, that romanticism was not enough. But still, see how long Spain held out! It shows that modern weapons are not everything. . . . I don't know his name, we simply called him 'ruso'. . . . He often scolded us for our romanticism, but he himself was a romanticist. He loved Spain precisely because of her pure heart. . . ."

"I longed to go to Spain. . . . A fellow student of mine at the institute was killed there. . . ."

"We buried our 'ruso' under an olive tree, but we did not put a gravestone over the grave—we were afraid it would be desecrated. I know where the grave is. If we go there again. . . . But I can hardly believe it. . . ."

"We shall go there again! Only by another route. Through Berlin."

"It's good to hear you say that! Here everything is so depressing. . . . People are afraid of Hitler. And Germany—she is a terrible force. I know how they are preparing. . . . They must attack the Soviet Union—they will be unable to remain in power unless they do."

"We are strong because we know this. Take me, for example—since boyhood I have heard nothing else but: 'It is inevitable'. . . . At first

they said 'encirclement,' then came fascism, and it attracted all our enemies to itself like a magnet. And we know that the tussle must come. I remember that, when I was a boy, we looked hopefully to the West. We thought about revolution. . . ."

"Now you are disillusioned, is that it? . . ."

"No. . . . But you must understand that history moves in a spiral. That takes decades. . . . At present, we must rely primarily upon ourselves."

"But what have we to rely on?"

"On yourselves. And on us."

"When I was in the concentration camp I thought a lot about Moscow and tried to picture to myself how you people live there. . . . But it was hard to form a picture. . . . In the illustrated magazines Russian girls are always smiling. . . ."

"They do smile, and smile beautifully. Only not as often as they would like. . . ." Sergei burst out laughing. "And not as often as I would like. Ours is a hard life. It seems to me that we shall go on living like this—on scaffolding—until we're old and never see a cosy apartment. Don't think I'm complaining, I wouldn't exchange this mortar for anything. Our natures are much more complex than people think. Either Hell or Paradise—that's what you find in Dickens' books. But in my country life is a mixture. . . ."

"Once I met a comrade from Moscow, I had just arrived from Argelès. You have read about Argelès, haven't you? People died there every day. . . . He asked me about Spain and I told him, and then he asked me which was the best place to buy a dress length, at the Galeries La Fayette or Printemps, and what kind of stockings to buy. There's something here I don't understand. . . ."

"But I understand. Don't be afraid. I'm not going to ask you where to buy stockings. I haven't got a wife, and besides, I don't like shopping. I'll explain it all to you. . . . It's hard here for people like you—they are in the throes of the struggle, they are flung into prison, they perish, but buying a suit of clothes is not such a difficult problem for them. . . . Have you ever thought what privation our factories cost us? Naturally, when a man like that finds himself in a shop he doesn't know what to look at first, he has a young wife and she wants nice clothes. . . . There's nothing in this to admire, nor is there anything to censure. He asked you about stockings, but, if necessary, he will get into a tank and die like a hero. All this is very complicated. . . . I, for example, when I read that we have manufactured so many pairs of stockings, I am as pleased as if we had won a victory. What are stockings to me? But—they're what we ourselves have made. . . ."

"How I envy you! You have a people."

"And you too have a people."

"I don't know. . . . You spoke about complexity, but in your coun-

try everything is simple. You can be pleased because you are making your own stockings. I look upon every Soviet person as a teacher: he knows more and can do more than I. But as regards feeling, it is different. . . . When you speak, it seems to me that I am an old woman who has lived a long and terrible life. For me everything is more complicated. . . . Forget your own country for a moment and try to understand. . . . It is an entirely different world. I was married to a Jew, that is, Heinrich always regarded himself a German, his friends were German, and he married a German woman—I was a clergyman's daughter—and he worked like everybody else, he was a chemist. He had long been interested in politics and a year before Hitler came into power had become a Communist. It was just then that we met. I was very young, almost a child. Don't be surprised, I'm only twenty-five. . . . I don't know how others love, that is, I know from books, but I loved him so that I could not fall asleep at night for fear that I would not see him in the morning. We spent two weeks in the country together, in a village near Stuttgart. Then I learned what happiness is. . . . After that came Hitler. People came to me and urged me to renounce my husband: 'You are the daughter of such respectable parents,' they said. I smiled in reply, because my husband was with my mother, she was hiding him. We both had to go into hiding. Heinrich worked in Hamburg, the underground organization there still managed to keep going. It was awful to see how some betrayed the cause; you meet one of them, and he is already singing a different tune. I was living on a false passport. I met my husband rarely, mingling with other people. In August nineteen thirty-four he was arrested. They tortured him for eight days to compel him to name his comrades. I knew that they were torturing him—there was a Stormtrooper there and he said to me: 'I'll not give you away because I respect your father. As for your husband, forget about him, we'll turn him into Jewish bacon. . . .' His name was Heinrich, like my husband's. . . . I thought I would go mad, I felt all the torture he was going through. They got nothing out of Heinrich. . . . They sent him half dead to Dachau. For some reason I still hoped, dreamed that he would escape, but he was already dead. In Spain I felt more at ease with Spaniards or with Frenchmen, Germans I avoided. This was awful, because there were some fine Germans there, like my husband, perhaps they were his friends. You will not understand me, but I can't explain. There will be war. Do you understand what that means to me? To you everything is clear. But I hate and yet love Germany. My mother is dead, but my father is there, and I am afraid to enquire about him, not that I'm afraid he may have been arrested, they could have arrested him, of course, what I'm afraid of is that—he may have put his faith in Hitler. If that is so, then I have no father. . . . I've grown unaccustomed to speak German, not long ago I heard Hitler speak, and the language seemed revolting to me. And yet in that language I have heard the best that one can hear in one's life. . . . And the

village in which I spent a fortnight with Heinrich? It's just an ordinary German village, lime trees, green, sour apples. small boys wearing caps with shiny peaks, old men gathered round the skittle alley.... Can I want all this to perish? ... In Spain I avoided my fellow Germans, but when one of them was killed my heart was torn, for after all, they were my own, and they suffered as I did. As I am speaking to you I suddenly think to myself—if the Germans are with Hitler, you must hate all Germans, and their language, and that village, everything, everything.... How sad, how lonely I feel!..."

Sergei remained silent, he was shaken by the depth of this other person's grief. he felt that he had no words with which to console Anna. and besides, it was not words she needed. He only pressed her hand and said slowly, addressing not her, but himself:

"I hate them. But all? ... We are not fascists! Even if they all follow Hitler I will remember you—so that means not all. ..."

At a neighbouring table two men were sitting; it was evident that they had emptied quite a few glasses—they were talking not loudly, but with strained voices, like actors, and drew circles in the air with their hands.

"Mortier says 'it's because there's going to be war.' But I know it's because he wants to marry his lame daughter to Dejean. And there's going to be, not war, but another drink for you and me. Hostess!"

"Agreed—let's have another. That game-legged Mortier is a black-guard in general. Last autumn he borrowed my pointer for two days and came back and said that the dog had chased the lady birds and had run off to America. But there is one thing, I tell you, old man, on which game-legged Mortier is right, there will certainly be war, because. ..."

"Because what?"

"Because I say so."

"It's not you that's saying it, but game-legged Mortier. And there won't be a war because there has already been one."

Anna said:

"You see the mood they're in. They don't realize the danger. ..."

"A man like Lancier is convinced that if war does break out it will be far, far away from his Corbeille."

"He's a stupid fellow, but quite decent, I think. ..."

"And his daughter? ..." Sergei at once felt embarrassed: what a foolish question!

"I like her, although she talks nonsense. But she's not to blame—that's the way she was brought up. They don't see that death is stalking by their side. I remember a play, by Maeterlinck, I think. There is a scene showing a house, in a cosy room people are having supper, but some people are whispering outside the window—they have brought to the house the drowned body of the daughter, and in another moment they

will knock at the door. . . . But this is still more awful. Did you notice the man who came after dinner? The one with the clipped moustache. I will tell you about him. . . . When I came to Paris I was given an assignment. The Nazis wanted, under false pretenses, to send the comrades from the International Brigades to Germany. For four months I worked as a typist at the Europe Travel Bureau, they had a centre there. I failed to learn anything about the International Brigade men, but I learned something else. It was there that I saw this Roy. He came there twice, made enquiries about a ticket to Argentina, then said that he wanted to reserve a cabin de luxe and went upstairs to see Schirke. . . . In all probability Lancier doesn't suspect anything, he buzzes like a bee about poetry and thinks that it is lace all around him, when actually it's a spider's web. . . . I'm so glad I've met you, my nerves are unstrung, I can't sleep, and sometimes I give way to craven fear. You have calmed me. . . ."

On taking his leave he said in a kindly voice:

"Good night, comrade!"

Then he strode through the streets that were glistening in the night after the rain. Automobiles rolled noiselessly by. And noiselessly lone young women sauntered past, their heavily rouged lips showing vividly against their livid faces. And everything was mixed up in his head: Anna's grief, some sort of Travel Bureau, the junk at Corbeille, verses, streets, the smell of the sea and exhaust gas. But when he reached, his court in the "cité" where there were no lampposts, the stars came out—many, very many stars. Formerly he had been fond of watching the starry heaven, would pick out his favourites and had known their names. . . . Even the sky was different here—a southern sky. "That big green star there—what is its name? If I were a poet I would write about the stars. About the stars, and about love, as strong as that frail little woman's love for her husband. Everything is complicated and irremediable. . . . Anna loses Heinrich. But Nivelle writes poetry. But he knows nothing about such love or about these stars. . . . Words! What's the good of them? What a grand and mournful night! That one with the sad green eyes and the smile of a petulant child, her name is Mado. She is in Paris. And I am now in Paris. But what will be a year from now? . . . The star will remain, large and green. . . ."

3 4

Lancier laughed bitterly: he had read in the past about "black Wednesdays" and "black Fridays"; to his lot had fallen a "black Thursday." Only a week ago he had been calmly performing magic with the poularde. . . . Events developed too fast for him, and Lancier hated being hustled. Once he was obliged to return from London by aeroplane

and for a long time after he grumbled: "You see nothing but clouds and your own insignificance. People have gone crazy about speed, as if it was not death ahead of them, but a prize—the cup of immortality. Dine quickly, change mistresses quickly, read books quickly, die quickly. . . ." And this sybarite was obliged to live through more in one day than he had lived through all his life.

He had to give Gaston Roy an answer: payments were long overdue. Lancier pulled himself together and said: "All right." Next morning they went to an attorney and settled everything. An hour later a telephone call came from Vlakhov. Lancier understood that the Russian was getting impatient. But when, at the opening of negotiations, Lancier had informed Roy of the current business on the books of Roche aîné, Roy had said emphatically: "The contract with the Russians must be cancelled. They are customers for an hour. Let them sue us, they will lose the case anyhow. We have plenty of other customers, and people with a future at that. Bilbao will take this consignment. . . ." Lancier argued for a long time, but Roy was adamant. Then Lancier decided to drag out the business with the Russians. But at last Vlakhov was fed up with it. What a pity it was to break off relations with them! Roy is inexperienced, he thinks a gang of swindlers in Bilbao are more reliable than a big state. And Lancier has been doing business with the Russians for eight years. . . . Yes, but to deliver the order meant quarreling with Roy. Why was not Alpert here, he would have found a way out. . . .

Lancier decided to put off the climax once again: perhaps Alpert would come back in the meantime. But Vlakhov was stern and insistent. Then Lancier said:

"Do you remember me telling you about the reorganization of Roche aîné? Well, that has now been effected. Monsieur Alpert and I have a new partner, you made his acquaintance last Thursday—Monsieur Gaston Roy. . . ."

"I understand," said Vlakhov. "But you'll have to deliver the order all the same, I have spoken to our attorney about it. And there will be no new orders. If we want to do business with German firms, we shall place our orders in Germany. We don't intend to do business with Frenchmen who are backed by Germans."

Lancier flared up:

"I may have financial embarrassments but I am a Frenchman not a guttersnipe! Why do you talk to me like that?"

"Because your Roy is—a strawman."

Lancier protested, fumed, Sergei laughed:

"What about the Europe Travel Bureau? . . ."

Lancier flew out of the room without taking his leave: the Russian has gone mad! They suffer from persecution mania, they see spies everywhere. Roy makes no secret of where he gets his money from:

the Economic Information Agency. What have the Germans got to do with it? One must be mad to drag the Travel Bureau into the business! . . .

After thinking things over Lancier decided that it was not worth attaching importance to what Vlachov had said. But something gnawed at his innards. . . . He could not eat, he barely answered Marceline's anxious questions; he lay down to take a rest, but suddenly he jumped up and ran to the telephone. Roy was not at home. Lancier was tormented with anxiety: suppose there was some truth in what that Russian had said? I made enquiries, of course. . . . But what about? Only about his financial soundness. He has money. But where does the money come from? Only very recently the Economic Information Agency was on its last legs.

It often happens like that—some sink and others rise to the surface—was the thought with which Lancier tried to soothe himself, but he could not be soothed. Late in the afternoon he found Roy: he must see him today, at once. . . . Roy suggested that the conversation be left until next day, but Lancier insisted.

"Very well, then. I'll put off another appointment. Come to the Cigogne, we'll have dinner together."

Gaston Roy adhered to his own rules of life, which enabled him to remain self-possessed under all circumstances: he was convinced that life was—a dull, unpleasant business in which, however, delightful exceptions occurred. It was difficult to make him lose his appetite or his sleep. Even now he found the cooking at the Cigogne irreproachable, notwithstanding the tense situation. Lancier seemed to be bereft of his senses: perhaps he was drunk? Why, only that morning they had visited the lawyer and had talked in the most amicable manner, Lancier had even asked Gaston Roy to introduce him to his wife. . . . But now he failed to greet his partner when he came into the restaurant, and he paid no attention to the maître d'hôtel, who was subserviently offering them the menu. The moment he sat down he shouted:

"The late Roche left an honest name! . . . I won't allow anybody to make a fool of me! . . . I am a Frenchman, a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour! . . . I fought at Verdun! . . ."

Roy frowned, nevertheless he said in a friendly tone:

"First of all, cher ami, tell me, what shall we begin with? I suggest lobster."

Lancier looked dully at him, waved the maître d'hôtel away with his serviette and continued to shout incoherent phrases.

"What's upset you like this?" Roy dared to enquire.

"You."

"I? . . ."

"Yes, you. I want to find out at last where you sprung from."

This was senseless and rude. Gaston Roy sighed and began pen-

sively to suck a lobster paw in the expectation that Lancier would calm down. This went on a good half hour. At last Lancier fell silent.

"Perhaps you'll drink a glass of Riesling?"

"Thanks. I'm not feeling well. I think I was a bit rude.... Please don't be offended, I'm at my wit's end. You alone can help me. You are my partner, there should be no secrets between us. I let you into all the affairs of Roche aîné. Why don't you tell me the most important thing?"

"I don't understand...."

"I want at last to know what this Agency of yours is."

"My God, I have told you lots of times. We collect information and analyse the state of the principal branches of French industry."

"But what for?"

"For the bulletins. You get them, don't you?"

"Circulation six hundred, price of subscription three hundred francs. Why are you trying to pull my leg?" Lancier again raised his voice.

"You knew this before."

"Before I tried not to think."

Silence ensued and Roy was glad: evidently there would not be a second outburst. He ordered smoked beef, which was excellently cooked. A girl came up and proffered a bunch of flowers, narcissus, and they looked like stars. In the next room dancing commenced and the saxophone pleaded for love. Suddenly Lancier leaned across the table and breathing heavily into Roy's face enquired in a whisper:

"And what about the Europe Bureau?..."

Although usually self-possessed, this embarrassed Gaston Roy; his fork halted midway between his plate and lips. Now Roy understood what Lancier's outcries meant. The situation was not an easy one. Roy did not feel that he had been caught playing a low game, but he was disconcerted on realizing that his partner knew his cards.

"If this—is German money. I don't want it, do you understand—I don't want it!"

Gaston Roy realized that he had before him a lucky man who had lived his life in spiritual comfort, an infant who had been thrown into the world of greed and cunning. It was difficult to explain to a man like that the simplest of all things, which in Roy's opinion was the law of life. The son of a ruined financier, and having received a legal education, Gaston Roy entered business not for the love of it—his life had worked out that way. He was not keen on luxuries, but he wanted to live decently, without denying his wife and children that comfort which to them seemed natural. Lancier's behaviour was an affront to him. In what way was this fool with his African goat better than he? ... True, Gaston Roy did not have a rich father-in-law, he had married his equal and had worked as hard as he could. ... Roy was a respectable man in private

life, paid his debts punctually, was not a scandalmonger, assisted his poor nephews and brought up his children so that they should not go astray, become thieves or blackmailers. But in business Roy forgot about morals, he often said that it was silly to sniff cheese, because cheese was supposed to smell. He worked with Schirke as he had worked with others—without enthusiasm, but without shame. He watched the affairs of different firms and when they got into difficulties he reported to Schirke. This was the case with Roche aîné. Schirke suggested that Lancier should be financed. Roy was simply the go-between and nothing more. All this was simple, everyday, and even boring. But how can you explain this to a man who thinks that life consists of beautiful verses and a steady income? . . .

"I can't understand what you are getting excited about, money—is money. There is no shady business here, nor cheques likely to be dishonoured. In these times interests interlock. I don't think you would censure de Wendel. . . . Yes, I have business connections with the Europe Bureau. What's wrong with that?"

"But they are"—Lancier grew hoarse with agitation—"they are—Germans!"

"I have already told you that there are no frontiers in the business world. They are above all honest men. What do I care about their nationalities?"

"So you yourself admit that they are—Germans?"

"As far as I know we are not at war with Germany. . . ."

"We are not at war with them today, but tomorrow. . . ."

"You yourself have laughed at the panicmongers, and you have said that a compromise will be found."

"Of course. And it will be a very good thing if Bonnet reaches an agreement with Ribbentrop. But this is different, it's a personal matter. . . . Am I a Frenchman or not a Frenchman?"

"It's very hard to talk to you today, you are introducing too much passion into a dry, prosaic subject. If war breaks out I will go and fight, you may be sure about that; I am a lieutenant in the reserve, am I not? But there is no war, and I am convinced there will be none. That's the first point. The second point is that I alone am connected with the Europe Bureau. Roche aîné remains a French firm. Nobody is exercising any pressure. . . . You doubt it? But what does the one fact that Monsieur Alpert remains a partner prove? . . . I am far from being prejudiced, as you know; a Jew, a Catholic or a Buddhist is all the same to me. But in Germany they think differently. If Schirke wanted to interfere in the affairs of Roche aîné the first thing he would do would be to demand the removal of Monsieur Alpert."

"What next? Perhaps those gentlemen will demand my removal?"

"Don't get excited, my dear Monsieur Lancier; I repeat—nobody intends to interfere in our affairs."

"Stop! But what about the business with the Russian orders?"

"Schirke had nothing to do with that, I take that responsibility upon myself. You know I'm not a politician, and least of all do I intend to introduce ideology into business. But I think that your contract with the Russians doesn't pay. I proposed Electra of Bilbao. I may be right or wrong, we may argue about that, but it has no connection with the Europe Bureau. If you are not infected with political fever you will be the first to admit that, in general, the Germans are little interested in our internal affairs. They want to regain possession of Danzig, but they are little concerned about the kind of government we have in this country. Bear in mind that I am not an admirer of Hitler; he may be all right for Germany, but a regime like that would not last a week in this country. I only want to emphasize that Hitler does not in the least want to export his ideas, on the contrary, he monopolizes them, he is an isolationist if you like. Take the name of their party—National, that means purely German. People call their ideas a plague. I don't know. . . . At all events, only the Germans suffer from that plague. Now Moscow—is a different matter. . . . There are Communists everywhere, even in Patagonia. And the Russians are not satisfied with their own territory. Did you hear our fools on the fourteenth of July shouting 'Soviets everywhere!'—that's where the danger lies. . . ."

Roy went on talking at length about the malignant designs of enemies, about the peace that France deserved. He felt that the storm had passed. Lancier calmed down, he even forced himself to eat a piece of beef. The end of the dinner seemed peaceful. The saxophone was now wailing lyrically, and the narcissus on the table exhaled sweet perfume as they wilted.

When Roy called the waiter to pay the bill Lancier drew out his wallet, and here something unforeseen happened—everything reawakened in his mind, he whispered with disgust: "German" and felt a sharp attack of nausea. He ran to the lavatory and vomited there. He dragged himself to Corbeille with difficulty. When Marceline saw his pallid face and the large beads of perspiration on his brow she caught fright. He was barely able to gasp:

"It's nothing. . . . Don't be alarmed. . . . I dined with Roy at the Cigogne. . . . I feel sick. . . ."

"Has something upset your stomach? What did you eat?"

"No. . . . It's nerves. . . . I'm very tired. . . ."

He lay for a long time with a wet towel round his head. Marceline's shadow flickered on the white wall. He had never thought that a clock could tick so loud. And when his wife whispered anxiously: "Maurice," he broke down:

"Marceline, forgive me! I have ruined everything, everything. . . . We must sell Gelinotte. It's awful! . . . I did not want to. I did everything. . . . I signed the agreement with Roy this morning. But it is im-

possible. . . . Legally he is right. But do you know what money this is, Marceline?"

She looked at him with horror:

"Stolen?"

"No, German."

He said that and at once asked himself: "Why do I say that? . . . What are the Germans to Marceline? . . . She lives in a different world. . . . And besides, am I not exaggerating? . . . That Roy argued logically, it was hard to make any reply. Yes, it's true, everybody respects de Wendel. . . . But I can't, I'm made that way. . . . But what about Marceline? . . ."

Marceline wept silently, covering her face with her broad sleeve. Fragments of images, isolated words, flashed through her mind as the clouds flash across the green moonlit sky on a cold winter night. War. . . . Maurice in a long, blue greatcoat, unshaven. . . . They say that the Boches will take Paris. . . . Lord, only not that! . . . Could Maurice really? . . . Suppressing her tears she said:

"Better sell everything—Corbeille and the books. . . . Maurice, do you remember Noisy?"

How long ago that was! Maurice had come home on furlough. They had wanted to take a rest together, but a telegram arrived from Noisy. Maurice's younger brother—nineteen-year-old René—was lying in hospital there. He was severely wounded and was in terrible pain. For four days and nights they did not sleep, did not say a word to each other. Then René died, and Maurice went to Verdun. They say that the heart can be shaken by several bars of an old march, or by the flutter of a bullet-riddled flag, or the half-obliterated name on a monument. Lancier and Marceline stood, shaken by a shadow—that of René, tossing in fever. They held each other's hand, their eyes were wide open, but unseeing, like those of a sleepwalker. . . .

Later, Lancier lay down on a couch, rested his cheek on his icy palm and fell asleep at once. But Marceline did not sleep. Vaguely she thought about something portentous. Life had passed, it had been nice and cosy, but it had lacked the main thing, what the wilful girl had once dreamed of. She wanted to grasp what this most important thing was, but could not, her thoughts wandered, René continued to toss in his bed. . . . And suddenly Marceline thought of France, thought sternly and at the same time in a homely way, as of a woman. What would become of France? Maurice was not the only one they had deceived. . . . Everybody was saying that there would be war. . . . Marceline could scarcely restrain herself from waking Maurice—she was so terrified. Then the cock crowed, and this rustic sound, which usually gladdens the heart, seemed to her to have a sinister ring about it. Everything a person can live through emotionally, she lived through on that short summer night, and in the morning she looked haggard and aged.

Lancier woke up with a heavy head as if after a drunken spree.

He began to recall the events of the preceding day and suddenly he saw Mado through the window; she was carrying a folded easel, and she looked particularly beautiful to her father. It was a very bright morning, the light shimmered. Lancier went to the bathroom, the water was warm and smelled of pine. Lancier shaved, and the lathered brush stroked his cheeks affectionately. Alma, Lancier's favourite sheep dog, sat at the bathroom door, waiting for her master and beating her tail on the floor. "Hey, you, drummer boy"—said Lancier, and felt perfectly soothed. He realized that the "black Thursday" had passed. Yes, he had got a bit heated yesterday. . . . He would have to break off relations with Roy, but not at once, there must be no scandal. The best thing would be to wait until Alpert comes back—let him decide. Alpert would be back not later than August. In the meantime he could go and have his breakfast. . . .

He inhaled the exhilarating aroma of the coffee. Marceline entered the dining room. Lancier felt repentant: he should not have told her, look how it has affected her. . . .

"I beg of you, Maurice, go and see Chozar at once, he will be able to sell Gelinotte quickly."

Lancier kissed her hand.

"All right, all right. . . . Only don't take it to heart. Everything will come right. . . . I'll send Alpert a wire."

* 5 *

Léo Alpert received the telegram in Kiev. Lancier wired: "Grave change in situation following agreement with Roy. Firm's reputation in peril. Please hasten return." This would have alarmed another person, but Alpert smiled and proceeded with his toilet. He had not dreamed of visiting Kiev for twenty years to leave it the moment he arrived! The firm's reputation! . . . One would think he was talking about a young woman. Lancier was fond of exaggerating. . . .

It was difficult to discourage Alpert, he believed that everything was for the best. One might think that he was fortune's favourite child, but actually his life had been an unusual and stormy one.

A long time ago a tailor named Naum Alpert lived in Slobodka, near Kiev. He was nicknamed "Loony," although he was a good tailor and the quietest of men. But there was one queer thing about this tailor—he was fond of indulging in fantasies; one moment he would say: "If I were the Governor-General I would have a hundred tall houses built in Slobodka." and at another he talked about New York as if he had lived there all his life. "He's had a drop too much," said new customers who met Alpert for the first time, but he never drank vodka, he drank nothing but strong, sweet tea.

One day Alpert received a letter from Paris, from a distant relative named Khishin, who informed him that he owned a haberdasher's store, that he was naturalized, and thanked God for the blessings He had bestowed upon him. This letter sealed Alpert's doom: he decided to migrate from Slobodka to Paris. His wife protested angrily: "How can I leave Mama here? And what will we do in a strange land where there will be no one to talk to? Some relation that Khishin—ten times removed! I won't say I'm living in clover here, but at least people understand me when I say that it is impossible to live with such a lunatic. . . ." But twelve-year-old Lyova thought his father's plan very alluring and he went about and boasted: "Do you know where I'm going? To Paris!" The husband and wife argued about the matter for several months and then, suddenly, something happened which astounded the inhabitants of Slobodka: "Loony" went away, taking Lyova with him: little Olya remained with his mother. At the parting many tears were shed. Naum promised his wife that he would come back if Paris did not turn out to be the paradise that Khishin had described, and Hannah agreed that if her husband managed to establish himself in his new place of abode she would leave her mother, sell everything and go to him.

Paris did indeed seem a paradise to the tailor from Slobodka: there were so many lights, so much good English cloth, nobody worried about residence permits. But there was no place for him in this paradise. The Khishins treated Alpert to a dinner and gave him lots of advice about how to behave in Paris; the old man's son spoke only French, and the tailor thought that he was doing this deliberately in order to show off his superiority.

Alpert rented a small, dismal shop in one of the filthiest back streets of the city and began to patch the clothes of the Parisian slum dwellers. He was very homesick and complained that there was "no tea and no real people" in Paris; he aged and looked like a tree that had been badly transplanted. But Lyova soon learned to speak French, made friends, and when his father expressed a longing for a glass of "good Russian tea," he retorted: "Respectable people drink coffee."

It was hard for the tailor to confess that he had really been mad to go, but it was still harder for him to live in a foreign land, and he began to contemplate returning to Kiev.

The war prevented this. He stopped receiving letters from Hannah. Kiev became unreachable. And Paris became dismal and haggard: the wealthy districts of the city became deserted, Alpert's neighbours went off to the war and their wives began to reproach the tailor for being willing to eat the bread of an alien country but unwilling to defend France. Alpert understood little about world politics but he possessed a sense of pride. When the baker's wife, from whom he had regularly bought his bread, said to him with tears streaming down her cheeks:

"My Jacques has been killed, Charles has lost a leg and only cowards like you have remained in Paris," he went to see the Khishins. "They're throwing it up in my face that I'm alive and have two legs, and I'm fed up with it. I want you to take Lyova, firstly, you are our relatives, and secondly, I'm going to defend your France."

Four months later private Naum Alpert of the Foreign Legion was killed in Champagne.

It would have been wrong to say that the Khishins were wicked people, but Lyova never heard a kind word from them. When the news was received that Naum Alpert was killed, old Khishin said: "Your father died like a hero," and he added, "we shall not throw you into the street." Lyova could not believe that his father was dead; it was only many days later that, on hearing Khishin asking his wife to make tea, he ran to his cubbyhole and wept bitter tears.

Misfortune came to the Khishins too: their son was killed at Verdun. The old man became morose, and his wife sat at the counter, her face swollen with tears, and told everybody who came into the shop about Victor's habits when a child; a year later she died.

When the war's over I'll go to Kiev—thought Lyova. But days, months and years passed. The war had ended long ago, but still Lyova did not go to Kiev. But he was no longer Lyova—the dapper student Léo Alpert was studying mathematics and dreaming of fame. After passing his examinations he took it into his head to write lyrical comedies. Khishin had managed to go bankrupt by this time and to die peacefully. For several years Léo lived without a profession, without a haven, and sometimes without dinner. But his innate gaiety never left him, and even in his most difficult moments he sang the song that he remembered from childhood:

*When spring returns
Fortune will smile. . . .*

Then he married a pretty milliner who by the caprice of fate was named Léontine, and he decided to settle down. The unsuccessful dramatist proved to be a talented engineer. He sold one of his inventions in America. Chance threw him into contact with Lancier; in some way they resembled each other, perhaps it was their happy-go-lucky natures. They struck up a friendship and Léo Alpert became a partner in the old French firm of Roche aîné.

He had long dreamed of going to Kiev, but only now was he in a position to do so without being ashamed to present himself to his mother and brother.

After he had shaved Léo Alpert wrote a reply to Lancier: "Entirely entrust you settlement all questions. Agree in advance. Don't get excited and take care of your health. Will return beginning of August."

He gazed with astonishment at the streets, the houses and the people.

Perhaps Kiev had changed? Or perhaps a man is so made that the scenes of his childhood gradually change in his memory and become fantasies? Léo did not recognize the city. Nor did he recognize his mother; from the photograph he had of her he remembered a young woman in a very broad-brimmed hat, but a tiny old woman resembling a bird entered his hotel room. She said "Lyova" and burst into tears. He kissed her withered hands, and mixing Russian with French he said: "Everything will be all right, Mama! . . ."

When he met his brother Léo was embarrassed—he did not know what to say. Osip also remained silent. Looking at them it was difficult to believe that they were brothers, so little did they resemble each other. Léo was a chubby, curly-haired blond with the face of a thriving child; one could tell at once from his eyes that he trusted everybody and was not inclined to censure anybody. Osip had black, stiff hair, and stiff was the expression on his face, his sharp nose and closely pressed lips; being reserved, he spoke in dry tones and even addressed his dear ones in newspaper phrases, he was distinguished for his straightforwardness, and for that sterling honesty which is capable of rousing both admiration and anger, so beautiful is it and so inhuman at times. He trod the path of life at an even, plodding pace and one thought one could see what he would be tomorrow, next year, in twenty year's time.

The brothers smoked in silence and then began to talk like strangers who had accidentally found themselves in the same room. This riled Léo. He always got on with every chance acquaintance, is it possible that he cannot have a heart-to-heart talk with his own brother? Several times he tried to adopt a friendly tone, but Osip was cold, almost hostile, answering laconically, and now and again slipping into the "you" instead of the more intimate "thou."

"Tell me, Olya, why do you behave towards me as if you were a diplomat. I know you are a Communist, but that has nothing to do with me. To me you are my brother and nothing else. And don't scowl at me in that way, as if I were a terrible capitalist! We had the same father, and I think Naum Alpert was neither a Rothschild nor a Deterding. True, I am now a factory owner, but that was not from choice, it was due to a happy blunder of fate. I shall not eat you, and I shall not hatch a bourgeois plot here."

Osip smiled and for a moment his face softened.

"I don't think you will, it's simply that I find it hard to talk to you—we are very different. I have not been abroad, but I know that it is an entirely different world. We here live differently, feel differently."

"Well, that's a debatable point! In my opinion all people feel the same. When they feel pain—they cry out, and if they are tickled—they laugh. I purposely came here to see how you were living."

Léo wanted to go at once to the house where his mother and brother lived, but Osip said: "It's late. . . . We shall expect you tomorrow."

Hannah Alpert began to tidy up the two rooms first thing in the morning. She and her granddaughter Alya lived in one of the rooms, while the other was occupied by Osip and his wife Raya. Hannah took an old tablecloth out of the trunk and bewailed the fact that she had no table napkins. She said to Raya: "It's not nice. . . . After all, he's a foreigner," and then she dried her eyes with her apron—she felt sad calling Lyova a "foreigner." Raya thought to herself: "I wouldn't have let him come here for anything!"

Raya offered to help Hannah to tidy up, but the old lady scolded her for it—the family regarded Raya as being weak and frail and would not allow her to cook or do the shopping. She was a small, pretty blond with dark eyes and very long eyelashes. She was a clerk at the City Soviet, was fond of music, and dreamed of a different, a beautiful life. She was twenty-five, but she had preserved much that was childlike; her husband seemed old to her; she knew he was wiser and more experienced, she believed every word he said, but she sighed to herself and thought: "He does not understand how much I want to live! Yes, we will build everything up, but I won't be young again. . . ." Once she saw an American film and was sincerely disgusted with it: "What a silly story"; but that night she slept badly—all night long she saw visions of Miami Beach, girls strolling under palm trees and idle lovers. She had fallen in love with Osip because he was different, she had fallen in love with his intrinsic honesty, even his harshness, she felt that she would never go astray with a man like that. But Osip would have been unable to explain why he had chosen Raya. Reticent by nature, he had not talked about his love, he had talked about other things, but he had looked and said nothing in such a way that Raya could not restrain herself and kissed him first. When they came back from the registry office Osip said: "Look, mother—the bear and the rose!" Hannah was afraid that this marriage would be shortlived—that Raya would desert Osip. . . . But a daughter was born; Raya flirted, often went to social evenings, and remained faithful to her husband.

That day Raya was totally unlike herself; usually gay and coquettish, she was reserved, even hostile, in conversing with Léo. He had brought her a bottle of Parisian perfume; she glared angrily at the bottle and said:

"Thanks. But I prefer our 'Red Poppy.' "

Hannah did her utmost to prepare a fine feast for Léo; he had no suspicion of the effort, resourcefulness and labour that dinner cost. Gazing at Léo, Hannah thought of her girlhood and of her departed husband—he's the spit of Naum! . . . When Léo recalled how his father had been fond of strong sweet tea, tears rolled down her cheeks. And this was the only minute of that cordial warmth which Léo had dreamed of in Paris.

Valya Steshenko burst into the room and exclaimed:

"Congratulate me, Rayechka! I'm going to Moscow...."

On catching sight of the stranger she was abashed. Osip introduced him: "Mister Léo Alpert," he laid emphasis on the word "mister," then he added: "My elder brother."

Léo felt offended at this, and the dinner ended rather dismally. Raya went off with Valya. Hannah asked Léo:

"Haven't you a photograph of your wife with you?"

Léo showed her a photograph: it was a picture of himself with a young elegant woman taken on the beach. Hannah sighed:

"I never thought I would have a daughter-in-law like that...."

He could not tell whether she was expressing admiration or censure.

A little girl came into the room and looked distrustfully at Léo.

"Say how do you do. Alyenka. What are you afraid of? Foolish child! This is your uncle, Uncle Lyova."

Léo picked the child up and laughingly pressed a large parcel into her arms. Alya did not look to see what was in the parcel—she was shy: after a little while she slipped into the next room, undid the parcel and smiled.

Hannah was tired and she lay down to rest. The brothers sat opposite each other in silence.

"Tell me, Olya, will you have any unpleasantness because of me?"

"No."

"Then I don't understand why you introduced me to that lady as 'Mister Alpert.'"

"I don't know, it just slipped out.... I suppose I wanted to emphasize that you are not one of us."

"But if a brother is a stranger, who is your kin? I don't understand. Is it that you don't recognize families?"

"Yes, we do. But we recognize something else besides—our Motherland. And here you are a stranger. You chose...no, you did not choose—it was Father, but that's how it happened...."

"So according to you, if one brother lives in Paris and another in Brussels they are—strangers?"

"You don't want to understand.... Paris, Brussels or New York—they are all the same, but here it is—different, and it is not kilometres that separate us.... Can I picture to myself how you live?..."

"I will tell you how I live, and how I lived before. And then you tell me about yourself. All right?"

Léo's narrative sounded to Osip like an adventure story, he listened to it with interest and with distrust, he knew his brother was speaking the truth, but the life that he described was like a fantasy. And when it came to Osip's turn to speak he limited himself to dry facts; he married

on such and such a date, worked in such and such a place. His life was similar to the lives of millions. He had gone to school, worked at a factory, went to college, became a planning economist and worked hard. . . . Realizing that his brother was not satisfied, he told him what had happened when Petyura's gangs came:

"Mother and I hid in a haystack for four days. . . ."

"And after that? . . ."

Osip remained silent. He could not tell this foreigner about the starvation, the subbotniks, about the fervent enthusiasm and ice-cold rooms, about the liquidation of the kulaks, the work of construction and the hourly struggle! You couldn't tell anybody about this—our own people knew it, and a stranger would not understand.

"Is that all?" enquired Léo.

"I don't know what to tell you. . . . We are still poor, but I am content with life."

"You think poverty frightens me, don't you? I myself lived like a hobo for three years. Aren't there lots of people in Paris who would envy you? Any number. It's something else that frightens me—you all look so stern. . . . In France even the tramp who sleeps under a bridge can be merry. What is the key to happiness? This ability to forget all difficulties, simply to play the fool, that is why they say: 'As happy as a child.' But you are always thinking of the future. You live only for the future. But tell me, is it possible always to speak of happiness in the future tense?"

Osip shrugged his shoulders:

"I am happy now, this very minute. Does happiness lie only in recreation and gaiety? The struggle—that is even a greater happiness. . . ."

Léo went away. Osip felt dead tired, as if he had been lugging half-hundredweight sacks. He was awakened out of his lethargy by Alya hugging a pink toy camel, she lisped gaily: "Gone, gone!"

Then Raya came, looking thoughtful and absent-minded. Osip asked her when Valya was leaving; she did not answer. She did not even play with Alya. And when Osip sat down at his desk to work, forgetting all about that painful conversation, Raya began to rail against Léo:

"Why is he so smug? 'This is Parisian,' 'In Paris we. . . . Makes you sick to listen to it! A good thing Valya came. . . ." Suddenly, in a different voice, Raya said in a singsong tone: "Won't I ever see Paris? The Champs-Élysées, the Tuileries. . . . It's awful to be able only to read about all this! . . ."

Hannah lay on the couch behind the screen sobbing quietly: "Poor Lyova, how he has changed!"

Léo walked along in a depressed mood: he had pictured his meeting with his relatives quite differently. Perhaps Osya was right.

but these people were not human, they were stones. . . . He thought longingly of Paris, of its lights, its songs and its lightness, yes, lightness—it seemed as though even sorrow was as light as a feather there. . . . On seeing a chestnut tree he smiled: at last I meet a friend! The only friend I have in my native town—that chestnut tree, exactly like those in Paris. He must go back as soon as possible. And besides, Lancier was getting nervous. . . .

On the eve of his departure Léo asked his brother to go to Slobodka with him, he wanted to see the house in which he had spent his childhood. Little had changed in that street. A woman was hanging out her washing; she looked distrustfully at the strangers; a pup yelped spitefully. They sat down on a bench near the house. Léo said:

“Father loved to sit here. For some reason they called him ‘Loony.’ He used to dream aloud, dream that he would go away somewhere, or that Slobodka would be like New York, he said that people would stop warring against each other, that there would be no more pogroms. But he was killed in the war. I was told that he rushed forward singing some song. A bullet hit him in the chest. . . .”

“What a pity he went away almost on the eve of the revolution. He would have understood. . . . Nobody here calls such people lunatics.”

“I don’t think Father would have liked this sort of life. He was a child. You people are not like that. . . . You are all—prosecuting attorneys, honour bright! I am leaving tomorrow, Osysa, there is one thing I want to ask you. . . . I used to sit on this bench with you. You don’t remember, you still wetted your trousers then. . . . Doesn’t that create any bonds between us? Why do you try to fence yourself off from me all the time?”

“I am not fencing myself off, it’s automatic. Believe me, it’s painful to me too. . . . When you wrote that you were coming, I was glad. Isn’t it happiness—to find a brother! But when you arrived I realized that you are—a stranger, and that Mother is the only bond between us. What’s the use of pretending? If you were in need, perhaps it would be different. . . . But you don’t need anything. . . .”

“Except affection.”

“But can you make that to order? I will tell you straight, and don’t ask about the details. . . . We have gone through a lot. It’s been very hard. And probably will be for some time longer. . . . But—this is ours. And you come along, an outsider, and want me to open my heart to you.”

“I want to throw down the wall, but you keep propping it up.”

Osip remained silent for a while and then said quietly:

“Neither of us can do anything about it—the wall is within us.”

From Warsaw Léo travelled in the same compartment with Chaumier, a member of the Chamber of Deputies. The deputy questioned him about Russia.

"I am glad I have been there," said Léo. "It's a wonderful country. They have done more in twenty years than we have done in a century. If war breaks out they'll beat the Germans, you can be quite sure about that. Those people are not even human, they are stones. . . ."

Chaumier laughed sceptically.

"You can't wreck tanks with stones like that. I have read the report of the Military Commission. . . . They showed you only the façade. They can't fight—they have neither the cadres, the discipline nor the transport facilities."

After crossing the French frontier Léo got out at a railway station to stretch his legs. The rain had stopped, the air was impregnated with the fragrance of wistarias. A telephone operator in his shirt sleeves was singing: "Mimi. Mimi, take me. . . ." Somebody said: "The newspapers say there'll be war in a month. In that case they will take me. . . . Let's have a drink in the meantime. . . ." A girl was peering into a mirror and pensively rouging her lips. The scene was tranquil, sad and pleasant. Léo thought to himself with relief: Well, I'm home.

* 6 *

"Thanks for dragging me out," said Raya. "Did you see that tableau?"

"Disgusting?"

"No. Why should he be? He seems a nice fellow. He brought me a wonderful bottle of perfume, very touching. But what could I talk to him about? . . . How lucky you are to be going to Moscow, Valya! . . ."

The young people often gathered in Steshenko's house. Alexei Nikolayevich would pay his attentions to his daughter's friends with somewhat old-fashioned courtesy and retire early to his room. His wife, Antonina Petrovna, was distinguished for her hospitality: even in the hard times she had treated Valya's guests with apple jam tarts, or dough-nuts. That day she had been busy since the morning: there was something to celebrate—Valya had long dreamed of entering the Cinema Institute in Moscow, and at last her dream had come true. Antonina Petrovna was terrified at the thought of having to part with her only daughter, but she consoled herself with the thought: who knows, perhaps Valya really has talent? . . .

Valya was not beautiful, nor was she ugly: her face, the most ordinary face in the world, was transformed by a vague, barely perceptible smile, and at such moments Valya looked attractive. Every-

thing about her was vague; she detested both vigorous gestures and precise definitions. Her mother said: "You are such a sleepy girl; I wonder when you will wake up." Young men fell in love with Valya, but not seriously—for an evening, for a week; she did not dismiss them, nor did she allow any closer intimacy; to her casual admirers she remained a pleasant, vague recollection. One day she said to Raya: "They say that strong characters are unsuitable for domestic bliss, but I shall remain single because I have not a strong, but an awkward character...."

And now Valya was going away. Soon none of the old friends would be left. In their school days they had jestingly called themselves the Pickwick Club—in honour of Borya Pick. Alexei Nikolayevich would say in jest: "Four maidens and one wooer." The girls giggled when they heard this: it was funny to think of Borya as a wooer.... His face reminded one of a lump of clay on which the sculptor had just started work; everything bulged—his fleshy nose, his cheekbones, his bedraggled eyebrows; and amidst this chaos shone a wonderful pair of large grey eyes. Borya was a mechanic and wrote poetry, but he never showed his verses to anybody. He lived with his mother on the outskirts of the city. Vera Platonovna Pick had become a widow soon after her marriage—her husband was killed in the Civil War; she devoted all her life to her son. She was a modest woman, almost illiterate, but possessed profound knowledge of human feelings. When the Pickwick Club met in the poorly furnished room in which she lived with Borya, the girls were always amazed at her wisdom and sensitiveness. One day Valya said to Raya: "We go to school, we read, we try to understand, but Vera Platonovna has read nothing, and yet she understands absolutely everything...."

"Valya, how lucky you are!..."

Antonina Petrovna brought in a bottle of Malaga.

"Where's Zinochka?"

"She'll be here presently, no doubt."

Zina Mitrofanova was of an ardent nature, but retiring, and people who knew her little said—"she's proud." But her friends admired her intrinsic self-reliance, strong will and individuality. She was now writing the treatise for her diploma. And what a strange theme she had chosen: "The overcoming of death in the ancient epic"! She rented a tiny room on the outskirts of the city, lived very frugally, but never complained. What character she has—thought Antonina Petrovna when hungry Zina would obstinately refuse to touch the delicious pie and gaily answer: "Don't be offended, I've just had my dinner...." She lived alone: her mother died four years ago, her father she did not know, he parted from her mother when she herself was scarcely able to pronounce the word "papa." It was said that she had been engaged to a man who failed to return from Spain; perhaps this was mere

gossip—Zina willingly listened to the confidences of her friends, was able to encourage and console, but never entrusted her own secrets to anybody.

“Here she is! . . .”

But it was not Zina, it was Galochka, whom they called “the laughing girl.” But Galochka was not laughing now:

“Something awful has happened to Zina. She’s had some unpleasantness over her father, you know that, don’t you? It’s all about that business. . . . The Y. C. L. organizer had told her to write a statement. So she wrote that she did not know her father and therefore had nothing to add, I don’t remember quite, but something like that. I suppose she didn’t formulate it properly because they told her to write another statement. Some cad told lies about her. Of course, she’s wrong—after all, we are her comrades, and she ought to explain in full, but you know what she is. . . . They called a meeting and one fellow there—either he didn’t understand or didn’t hear properly—said ‘enemy. . . .’ She flared up and said: ‘You may take my card away, but I’ve always been a Communist and always will be,’ and went on talking in the same strain. . . .”

“But how does it stand now, Galochka?”

“Nohow. She won’t say anything. I went to her and said ‘let’s go to Valya,’ and she answered ‘I won’t.’ I tried to persuade her, but she said: ‘Don’t. It will be better for me and you.’ Then she told me that Nikitin no longer greets her. She put me out of the room saying—‘I have work to do.’ To put it short—she’s going nuts. . . .”

“I’ll go and see her tomorrow,” said Raya. “Only I’m afraid she will be offended. . . . She told me that she cannot understand people who like to be pitied.”

A gloom was cast over the gathering. Borya came, also looking glum. Galochka was obliged to tell her tale over again. Borya listened very attentively, with his exceedingly wide mouth slightly open, but said nothing. Then he buttoned his threadbare jacket with one button, picked up a glass and solemnly addressed Valya:

“I came to congratulate you. Now I’ll go. . . .”

Without even putting the glass to his lips he silently went away. Distressed though she was, Galochka could not restrain a giggle. Valya said:

“There’s nothing funny about it. I’m surprised he came: the way Tosya has treated him is simply awful. She told me about it herself. . . . He’s been madly in love with her for two years and at last he decided to propose. . . .”

“I told him to drop her. But he wouldn’t listen. She gets him with her looks, and she really looks an angel. . . .”

“But listen to what this ‘angel’ told him: ‘You have neither fame, money, nor an apartment, and yet you dare to propose to me? You’d

do better to look at yourself in the looking-glass. People with a mug like yours don't propose, they choose the strongest hook they can find.' Rough, wasn't it!"

"Disgusting! . . ."

Valya's parents had retired long ago. There were three of them—Valya, Raya and Galochka. Perhaps it was Zina's trouble, the scurvy way Borya had been treated, or the prospect that they were to part soon, but whatever it was, they felt inexpressibly sad: even the sickly sweet Malaga left a bitter aftertaste. They were all only on the threshold of life, but at present life frightened them, like a forest at night. Galochka tried to soothe herself:

"I'm quite sure everything will turn out all right with Zina. As for Borya, I'm even glad it happened—at all events, he now sees what Tosya is. . . . After all, he's a very nice boy. For some reason I think he has real talent. . . . Do you know what, Valya, I feel convinced that one day I shall read on a poster: 'Valentina Steshenko in the leading role.' And I'll go to the cinema and see you act. But you will forget the Pickwick Club. Now be good at least once in a while and think of the 'laughing girl' at the Head Office of the Cotton Industry. . . ."

"How foolish we all are! . . ." There were tears in Valya's eyes. "Our girlhood has ended. How good it was—in the clouds, but still 'cloudless.' You know the feeling, Raya—you are dozing off and suddenly your heart begins to thump, something awful. . . . All the time I'm thinking—another minute and it will burst. . . ."

"What?"—It was Galochka who asked.

"I don't know. My heart. . . . Happiness. . . ."

Galochka listened so intently, trying to understand what Valya was saying, that she upset the wine glass with her elbow. She almost burst into tears.

"God, what have I done!"

But Valya and Raya burst out laughing—so comical was Galochka's confusion.

They parted shortly after, neither sad nor gay, with that sensation of bubbling life and slight, almost elusive anxiety that might pass off on reading the first page of a book, the first words, and which might remain, thicken, and become a spiritual thunderstorm.

* 7 *

Borya went straight from Valya's house to Podol, where Zina lived. He halted on the high bank overlooking the Dnieper; that scene always thrilled him: the river was as majestic and plain as fate. Others have stood here and looked down in the same way—he thought—many years ago—lovers and heroes, and unknown cranks. . . .

He had forgotten the number of the house in which Zina lived and searched a long time. Zina was surprised when he came in, but she gave no evidence of it.

"I happened to be passing by."

"Passing by? Where from? . . . All right, sit down."

They remained silent for a long time. At last Borya said:

"Zina, do you believe in happiness?"

"I do."

"So do I. Not long ago a woman told me she was going to 'achieve happiness.' I asked—how? She explained it this way—she would find a well-known dramatist, or a man in a high position, and then she would have a fine apartment and go to Sochi. . . ."

"Disgusting!"

"And foolish. You may have an apartment today, but it may be gone tomorrow. . . . As if happiness can be given or taken away. Happiness—is your own."

"And it is painful; the greater it is the more painful it is."

"Last winter I read those lines of Bagritsky's:

*You looked into the eyes of a rifle,
You died like a man. . . .*

"I read and thought to myself: why was I not born twenty years earlier? But that's not the point. Every epoch tests the heart in its own way; it's not the epoch that's important, but the heart. I understand that now. . . . Perhaps it's true that our generation has been spoiled—we receive an education, we go to the theatre, argue about the merits of the different plays, fall in love, and even play parts in love tragedies—not very successfully, but still. . . . We look into the eyes not of a rifle, but of the girls. But are we the worse for that? Everything may change in an instant. . . ."

"Do you mean war?"

"I mean everything. War, too, if you like. We merrily sing 'If War Breaks Out Tomorrow' . . . But there is no 'if' about it, and there's nothing merry about it. . . . I was looking at our fellows yesterday and thought to myself—how many of us are marked? Don't think I'm worried about how it will all end—we are a sturdy people—I'm talking about the heart. You have chosen a wonderful title for your treatise: Overcoming death. It hits the nail on the head! Sounds like poetry. . . ."

"But Borya, I am afraid of death."

"Everybody's afraid. Even heroes. Yershov told me, he was at Hasan. . . . They are afraid, but when it is necessary they die. And how! . . . Why, it's an epic, and later, Zina—not you but another Zina—in the thirtieth century—will write a new treatise. But you, Zina, are

a brave girl. No, don't argue, please, I'm convinced of it, very brave. and the main thing is—you are a true Communist."

He said that with such conviction that Zina felt embarrassed. Both fell silent. A childish voice was heard through the thin partition: "If triangle *A* is imposed on triangle *B*..." It began to rain, in strong slanting streaks. Zina, who was sitting at the open window, smiled and wiped her face, but did not move away. And then a miracle happened: Borya read his verses to her. He never read them to anybody, and was angry when anybody asked him if it was true that he wrote poetry, but now he himself offered to read them: "Listen, Zina!..."

He read awkward, refractory lines that were full of that wonderful light which shone from his eyes. Later Zina tried to remember what the lines were about. It seemed to her that they had been about trees, huge, live trees, wounded by the axe, but refusing to yield, about pine trees, lime trees, and the chestnut trees of Kiev... But perhaps they were about war? Or about love?... No, it was not that. What about, then? About happiness? I don't know.... She did not think while he was reading, she allowed herself to be carried away by the maelstrom of words, by the sensation of rhythm that was like the wind in the steppe, or the rain, which was still beating against the windowpanes and flowing down the street through the vast world of night. When Borya took his leave she tightly squeezed his hot rough hand.

* 8 *

Yashchenko said:

"You see how complicated the situation is!... Moscow insisted as far back as the spring. We have now agreed to release you temporarily; as for later on, we'll see. I proposed Ignatyuk, but he said he had complications with his family, and besides, he's over forty, and the climate is complicated up there. And so I thought of you, if only you..."

Before he could finish Osip said:

"All right, I'll go. It would certainly be hard for Ignatyuk."

"But you have a wife, haven't you?"

"She must look after my old mother, so I cannot take her..."

"Yes, the old mother complicates the matter..." Yashchenko sighed. "As regards their living conditions, don't worry, we shall arrange everything here..."

Osip gazed at the map, it was hanging high up on the wall, and the place he looked for was right at the top—in the middle of the large green patch; he was obliged to throw his head back. He frowned—it would take a long time for letters to reach there... Then he went on with his work and thought no more about his forthcoming departure.

Raya's long eyelashes quivered.

"I shall go with you."

"Have you taken leave of your senses? They won't allow Ignatyuk to go, and you should have seen him pushing that car in Svyatoshin.... You have no idea where it is! In the winter it is difficult to breathe there."

"But people do breathe.... I can't remain here alone!"

"Yashchenko promised to arrange everything."

"I don't mean that...."

He glanced at her and felt embarrassed; tenderness appeared in his face like a blush. He kissed her tiny hands. He must find some way to soothe her.... And suddenly he remembered: he had a meeting at eight! He gobbled up his cullet and hurried off.

"Why must he go traipsing off somewhere in the North"—thought Raya. "If it were Georgia.... She would have gone with him. It would be a pity to leave Kiev, of course, but since he said he must.... But he's not going to Georgia!.... How can anybody voluntarily go to a place like that? He must be mad! Is it impossible to be honest and yet not do such foolish things? Nobody demands it of him, and besides, nobody appreciates it, on the contrary, they appreciate people who can refuse when it is necessary. Why aren't they sending Ignatyuk? Or Korotkov? They treat Osip like an errand boy, they've only got to say the word, and he's off like a shot. He never thinks of me. What shall I do here alone? Like Zina.... I'm going out of my mind as it is—gobbled up his food and ran off, he'll come back home late at night, and if I ask him anything he will say: 'Raya, dear, my head is in such a whirl that I can scarcely grasp what you're saying' and he will fall asleep, and so it has been every day for five years running! And the most terrible thing about it is that nobody compels him to do it, he likes it. He won't understand what it means to me, and yet he thinks he loves me.... I won't let him go! I'll say that I'm dying. Osip, do you hear—I am d-y-i-n-g!"

But Osip was not there; Raya was lying with her face to the wall. Hannah was saying to her granddaughter: "We must wash our hands, our hands are so dirty...." If only Osip would come back soon! But it was a long meeting, and he did not know how much Raya needed him just then.

Nor did he know it that night. He knew many things. Raya was mistaken: he was appreciated as an energetic and experienced worker. He knew how to overcome difficulties, go without food, without sleep, deny himself everything in life. When Raya expressed her amazement he shrugged his shoulders: "How can it be otherwise? Why, this is an important branch...." He knew that the storm was approaching: he had heard, read and thought about it since boyhood. He knew the times he was living in, how exacting they were, and how stern their language.

And yet he did not know Raya, although that woman's spiritual world was not so complex; he failed to see the interlacement of her feelings, he was perplexed by her sudden passages from sadness to joy, and from joy to despair. Why did Raya ask him every now and again: "Do you love me?" Why this distrust? Surely, everything was clear: she was his wife, and they had a daughter. When Raya complained that she felt the lack of affection he kissed her hands, the nape of her neck and strands of her bobbed hair, and thought, sometimes with tenderness and sometimes with vexation: It's just like a novel! . . . During his school days he had read a score or so of novels, but he had forgotten them long ago; now he had no time for novels—he scarcely had time to have a good sleep; the word "novel" was associated in his mind with the sensation of something pleasant, but enigmatical and tiring. He himself was unconscious of his feelings towards Raya, they were like gold hidden in the ore.

"I'm twenty-five. Osip, it's awful! Another year or two—and then old age. . . ."

"Nonsense! I am thirty, but I don't feel old yet."

"You are a man."

"What has sex to do with it? I don't understand. . . ."

"You don't understand anything. Wait, let me speak! . . . You always have your way, listen to me for once—don't go away alone! If you must go, take me with you."

"But that's impossible, Rayechka. If you don't believe me, ask Yashchenko."

"What do you want me to ask him? How to love? . . . How can I tell a stranger what is in my heart? I don't care if it is cold up there. I shall be colder alone. . . ."

She burst into tears and Osip felt a sharp pain in his breast. This happened every time; it was no use telling himself that Raya could weep over trifles; it was enough for him to see her tears to make him lose his head. He put his arms around her and wanted to soothe her, but he couldn't find the necessary words; the large green patch hovered before his eyes. What could he do? Raya would not be able to stand the climate, but go he must.

"Perhaps I'll be able to return earlier, in the spring."

She did not answer, she could not speak any more, she felt that her words were submerged in a vast, empty space; and in despair, no longer realizing what she was saying, she shrieked:

"I hate your work!"

They were walking up one of the hilly streets of old Kiev which make you lose your breath—so steep were they, so beautiful, with gardens in which the chestnut trees, maple trees and lime trees were already assuming their golden hue, with the low cottages, each living its own life, invisible, but intelligible to the passer-by who hears the laughter of

a young girl, the prattling of children and the coughing of an old man—probably an old-age pensioner who was now calling to mind how half a century ago he had climbed a similarly steep street with his beloved and had lost his breath.

Here they had met on that very day on which Raya's fate was decided; Osip had brought her a bunch of violets, but was shyly hiding them up his sleeve like a schoolboy hiding a cigarette. Raya recalled this and said pensively:

"Perhaps there is nothing more to dream about? Perhaps you and I have already been happy? . . ."

"Very. At least I have. . ."

With these words he wanted to express gratitude, love, but Raya shrivelled. So everything had passed, even that exaltation of the first weeks, which can scarcely be called happiness. And what lies ahead? . . . Valya could dream of fame, Raya had nothing to look forward to. In a year's time Osip will come back, greet her as if he had just come home from his office, and then run off to a meeting. Valya had said: "You have your music." There are people for whom music is life, for her it was only a means of forgetting herself. Can one live with dreams alone? If so, it would be better to swallow a sleeping draught and never wake again. . . . This thought sent a cold shiver down her back. Involuntarily she pressed against her husband. No, that was all nonsense! She must live! Only she did not want to live. But it was terrible to die. . . .

"Raya, it's very hard for me to part with you. . . ."

She felt better at once: perhaps she does not understand him and he, too, is suffering? . . . What a lovely evening! And Kiev was lovely. . . . It is not true that she does not want to live, she does, but it is very, very hard. . . .

They reached the edge of the riverbank; lights were visible in the distance. The smell of new mown hay was wafted to them by the breeze. They talked about domestic affairs:

"Buy Alya a pair of shoes, that's the first thing you must do. . . ."

"I forgot to pack your blue sweater, and you say that it is very cold up there. . . ."

"Sometimes letters are lost, so don't worry if there happens to be a long break."

Raya thought vaguely: it's not so bad if a letter is lost, but suppose it's love?

Osip left next morning.

The first hours of the journey were sad ones: he had visions of Raya, wondered what she was doing that moment, recalled her jokes, caprices and vexations. In Kiev he had never had time for reflection; now, parting from Raya, he felt as though he was meeting her.

Then he brushed these thoughts aside—gazed through the window, talked with his fellow passengers, got out at the stations. Every-

thing seemed interesting to him: the fields, the horticulturalist's statements about new varieties of apples, the argument as to whether agreement would be reached with Paris and with London, the bloom on the plums in the basket, and the factory buildings that were all aglow with a multitude of lights.

In Moscow he had been overwhelmed by the human torrent, by the lights and turmoil. He wandered through the long corridors of the People's Commissariat; and everything pleased him: the bustle, even the dry tone in which the Deputy People's Commissar had said: "Bear in mind—the task is a responsible one. . . ."

And again forests, rivers, factories, the trains going in the opposite direction, the bustling railway junctions flashed past. He thought to himself: "This is the map—not on a wall, but in real life." He felt exalted by the immensity of the country, he sensed it with his eyes, ears and lungs for the first time—here everything was different, even the air. . . . On dozing off—this was on the fourth or fifth night—he remembered Raya and felt sad because she was not by his side. But the train soon rocked him to sleep. And in the morning he saw wonderful things again, but instead of maple, he now saw birch, aspen and fir, and the place of the horticulturalist was occupied by an engineer who talked about a new type of crane, and other people argued about whether the Germans would fight or not. And Osip continued to rejoice: what a large, fine house he possessed!

He decided to write to Raya—he wouldn't have a minute to spare after he had arrived. . . . It was a disjointed letter, the other passengers were noisy, and his pencil hopped all over the paper.

"It's a wonderful journey. I think of Mother and remember how, every time she went out, she would come back bubbling over to tell us that Lipki was becoming unrecognizable, that the new house they were building was finished, that a plastics shop had been opened, and so forth. She would say that when she was young she used to go around grandfather's yard and orchard in the same possessive way to see how things were going. I, too, look and rejoice. Raya, you will say that this is another report on the current situation, but I am writing from the bottom of my heart, and I would like you to feel the same. Don't worry about me, I have seen people who have wintered here, in Kiev they exaggerated about the climate in these parts. I am worrying about your living conditions, and whether you have bought Alya a pair of shoes. Tell Mother to take care of herself, and don't feel lonesome yourself! I remembered that you asked me whether I have been happy with you, and I wanted to go back and hug you, you see what fantasies a man bereft of fantasy like myself can indulge in! Write often, my dear."

When Raya read that letter a feeling of pity for Osip suddenly overcame her: he was not old at all—he was a child, more foolish than Alya. . . . And then she felt vexed: he wanted to hug me and it surprised

him! No, he did not love her, he could not love, it was not in his nature, "living conditions"—that was all. . . . But perhaps this is the love of a grown-up man? After all, he is worrying about her. . . . Only she dreamed of something different. . . . And life was not the Pickwick Club, it was high time to understand that, high time to become cold, business-like—it will be easier that way. . . .

That same evening Osip thought of Raya: how delicate she was! And how far away—on another planet! Sadness overcame him, he recalled Kiev, the lights of Kreshchatik, cosy, like a long inhabited, breath-warmed valley, the gardens, the black sky and the big stars. Here everything was strange: the trees, the dialect and the night. He felt angry with himself: why this fit of the blues? It's just like in a novel. . . . Am I a stranger here? Everything is mine—Moscow, this swamp, and the foreman who the other day exclaimed in a comical way: "My head's beating like a sledge hammer today. . . ." It's all mine! And Raya—he added this in a half whisper with superstitious melancholy.

"Raisa Mikhailovna, I've got tickets for 'Anna Karenina.'"

Hannah sighed. It couldn't be denied, Fomichev was a nice man, never took any liberties and always wanted to afford Raya a little pleasure. She was lonely. . . . Hannah knew what it was to be left without a husband. She was ready for anything when Naum went away, only those were different times, she didn't go to the theatre, people feared God then, it may have been silly, but they feared. . . . But what was there to hold Raya back? She liked Fomichev, how anxiously she had enquired yesterday: "Did anybody telephone me?" And a quarter of an hour later Fomichev rang up. He seemed to be a decent fellow, but young, like Raya. . . . Hannah had tried to tell Olya that it was wrong to leave a young wife for a whole year, but that had made him angry. Of course, Olya understood all this himself, he was a clever lad—but this was state business, more important than Rayechka. . . . But Olya was attached to her, and they had Alya, and it was a poor life without a family. . . . One must be a lunatic, as Naum had been, to throw up everything and go off, God knows where, and on top of that to go to war for an alien country. . . . Poor Naum, he did not live, he conjured up fantasies, Lyova was like his father, only he was lucky, he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Olya was one of the quiet sort. . . . But who knew what was in his heart? Rayechka said that he must be mad since he himself volunteered to go to the North. . . . Perhaps Olya too is like Naum? . . . They all say that there is no God, but who except God can understand a man's heart?

Sighing, Hannah put Alya to bed.

Anna Karenina suffered a great deal, and forgetting about her companion, Raya wept.

Lancier kept putting off the decisive talk with Roy, although he had told Marceline: "It's all settled, the honour of the late Roche has been saved." He had delivered the order to the Russians—that was a matter of prestige ("I am not a puppet!"), but he hesitated to break with Roy. It transpired that the sale of Gelinotte would not save the situation. On learning this, Lancier was glad: very good! How could I rob Marceline? . . . Hopes that a miracle would happen faded, Lancier gradually got accustomed to the idea that he would have to work with Roy. What is there disgraceful about it? . . . He had got heated, had piled the colours on too thick. If the Germans are investing capital in our industry it shows that they don't intend to go to war against us. Of course, a German—is a German. . . . But I'm not obliged to invite Schirke or his like to Corbeille. And business is always tainted. . . .

That is how Lancier tried to soothe his conscience; but his heart rebelled. He was still seeking another way out, and turned first to one person and then to another. At last he decided to seek the advice of Joseph Berty, although he had a grudge against him. Berty had often visited the Lanciers in the past and was regarded as a friend, but suddenly he stopped coming. Still, Lancier decided to go and see him: he was a clever man and his voice was heeded. Whatever you might say about him—Nivelle thought he was a "skilful demagogue," Lejean thought he was a "camouflaged fascist"—primarily he was a capable man. It was sufficient to remember the wretched little factory he had inherited; now, it was one of the biggest plants in France. A man like that could suggest to him a way of freeing himself from that Roy. . . . The more so that Berty was a—true Frenchman, this business about the Europe Bureau would rile him no less than it had riled Marceline.

And indeed, Berty was a clever fellow; his sharply chiselled, longish face, which reminded one of the portraits of Fouquet, expressed a strong will; he possessed self-control, and only a slight quiver of his upper lip sometimes betrayed vexation. He lived alone in a house that looked deserted—so little furniture did it contain; Berty detested a lot of furniture and things, he called Corbeille (not in Lancier's presence, of course) a "flea market." But he loved his work. Around his factory he had built some nice cottages for his workers, a school and a hospital. A member of the Chamber of Deputies had visited the workers' village, and after looking round he said: "You'll be a Communist soon if you're not careful. . . ." Berty had laughed: "Not likely. First of all I'm a capitalist, but those who want to save everything run the risk of losing everything—one must reckon with the times." He was born on the first of January nineteen hundred, and he would say jokingly, but not without pride: "The twentieth century and I are coevals." Everybody knew Berty, but he had no real friends, nor did he trouble to make any. He

was something of a recluse; many thought he was enigmatic, although in his actions he was logical and cool.

That is why he had been put out by a queerness he had discovered in himself—his feeling towards Mado. When he realized why he was visiting the Lanciers so often he began to reproach himself. "What folly is this? I am attracted to her only because she is indifferent towards me. She is good-looking and intelligent, that cannot be denied, but are there not others no less good-looking and intelligent? If there is anything original about her, it is the bad features that she has inherited from her father and mother: she's eccentric, a madcap, happy-go-lucky, like the dragonfly in the fable. Such girls become heartless little women who ruin their husbands, or neurasthenics who are capable of taking up a revolver." All this sounded convincing to Berty, but it did not convince him: he continued persistently, gloomily, passionately to think about Mado. He never spoke to her about his passion, and he stopped visiting the Lanciers not because she had offended or rejected him: he wanted to prove to himself that he could live without Mado.

Had Lancier been in a different state of mind he would probably have noticed that Berty, who was reputed to be imperturbable, looked embarrassed when he said: "We are all angry with you for having forgotten us—Marceline, Mado. . . ." But Lancier was not in the mood to be observant: the prospect of this talk depressed him. He had to begin from the beginning, that is, his financial difficulties. When Lancier stopped to take breath before the most unpleasant part of his confession, Berty said:

"I've heard rumours. . . . You see, cher ami, you were born too late. You know how highly I think of you, but times are different now. . . . Once you showed me an ancient firearm, of the period of Louis the Sixteenth, if I'm not mistaken. Charming thing. But it doesn't shoot. . . . You want to preserve the habits and customs of the last century, but we are now in the middle of the twentieth. For you Roche aîné is an adjunct, and an unpleasant one at that, to Corbeille. And now you have the result. . . . You can't run a business on one level nowadays, you must either grow big or bust."

At the word "bust" Lancier shuddered. The opening of the conversation promised nothing good. But what did he expect? Berty was clever, but he too made shift with copybook maxims. Still, Lancier pulled himself together and continued his mournful tale to the end. He was convinced that the evil designs of the Germans would shock Berty, but the latter nodded his head and smiled from time to time.

"Could you ever imagine anything like that? . . ."

"But, my dear Monsieur Lancier, I do not see anything surprising in this. They are doing the same thing in other branches. It is natural, and I would not even dare to censure them for it—they want to live, it's not their fault that we are asleep."

"I did not know you were in favour of rapprochement..."

"Did I say I was in favour of rapprochement? I am ready to do business with the Germans, with the Russians, and even with the Papuas, if the Papuas should want to, and can, do business with me. That's not the point. . . . We are on the brink of doom not because of German infiltration, but because we lack unity, hope and incentive. Take Russia. The Bolsheviks are sustaining their people with the hope of the triumph of Communism, there are no people like you and me there, and the man who has a grudge has nobody to vent it on—a very clever arrangement. In America they keep up morale by different means: if prosperity is followed by a crisis, the crisis is followed by prosperity; you may be hungry, but the turkey which you will eat is already being fattened; you may be splashing through mud, but the automobile in which you will race through the forty-eight states is already being built. This, of course, is on a smaller scale than heaven on earth, but it is more concrete. Hitler found a third remedy, he says: 'We must conquer Europe and then every poor German will have something in his pot. . . .' Do you think it will be poule à la Henri Quatrième? No, everything there is 'kolossal.' He'll have a whole goose in his pot. And moreover, the Nazis warn their people beforehand: 'If Germany is beaten there will not even be an empty pot left.' Such are our rivals. What do we put up against them? Ministerial crises, Stock Exchange scandals, governments which organize strikes. They sign agreements knowing that they can't carry them out, brandish non-existent weapons, like mountebanks at a fair. What are you surprised at?"

Lancier felt that Bertie was wrong. But what could he say in answer to him? The man's logic was deadly. . . .

"In my opinion you are piling the colours on too thick. If we Frenchmen are roused, we will fight. I remember Verdun. . . . No, France will not perish!"

He fell silent. Bertie remained silent too. Suddenly Lancier remembered what he had come for: "I didn't come here to take part in a political debate. . . . He hasn't said a word about my business. Perhaps it is better that way—what can he say? I shall have to work with that Roy. . . ." Lancier got up to go. Bertie detained him:

"We haven't finished our talk. . . . Let's return to the subject of Roche aimé. What do you think of doing to save the situation?"

"I don't know. I wanted to sell Gelinotte, but that won't bring in enough. Besides, I have no moral right to dispose of Marceline's property. Frankly speaking, I see no way out."

He thought he had misheard—Bertie said:

"Yes, there is a way. I am ready to help you without any obligation on your part. The law of friendship. . . ."

Lancier grasped Bertie's cold, slender hand with both his own and

held it for a long time. He did not even think of Roche aîné at that moment, he was touched, enraptured by Berty's gesture. And yet they say that France is degenerate, that she no longer has any faithful wives, or loyal friends. . . .

* 10 *

Léo Alpert cautiously enquired of Marceline about the state of her husband's health. But before she could answer—Lancier burst into the sitting room with a merry laugh.

"At last! I was already beginning to think that you would never come back. . . . You are looking wonderfully well. That's what the air of your own country does for you. . . . Although I think you are more French than all Frenchmen put together. Are you pleased with your trip? It must be a wonderful country. I struck up a friendship here with a Russian engineer. A very refined nature. I showed him my collection of miniatures and, just imagine, he picked on the most valuable of them at once, you remember it, of course—the lady in the green hood. . . . A fanatic, but at the same time a mild, frank and gentle person. Land of miracles! Why don't you tell us about it? What did you see there?"

"I can't tell you all at once. I saw my brother. Also a fanatic. you are right there. A nice fellow, hard working, has a good-looking wife and a daughter. But a fanatic all the same. He doesn't understand us, and doesn't want to. . . . But why don't you tell me what's happened here, Maurice?"

"Louis is a junior lieutenant in the Air Force. The boy's happy. I'm not very pleased about it, particularly now. . . . Apart from that, there's no change. . . ."

On seeing the amazement in Alpert's face he burst out laughing:

"Don't be angry, Léo, I forgot to tell you the main thing—everything's settled. It's almost an Oriental fairy tale—Berty helped me out. And without obligations, as an act of friendship. . . ."

"That's surprising! I don't know him very well, but everybody says that he is a hard man."

"That's because his logic is deadly. He proved to me, firstly, that Roche aîné ought to be scrapped, and that I, Maurice Lancier, had outlived my time; secondly, that the whole of France is like me, and that our end is coming soon because the Americans and the Russians are working, the Germans are arming, while we sit in cafés, sip apéritifs and abuse the government. I'll tell you what Berty is—he's a jolly good fellow who pretends to be a cannibal. He's fond of paradoxes."

"But they are not such paradoxes. You and I are really out-of-date. I felt that as I travelled through Europe. But you know what kind of life I have lived—played the fool, did a lot of scribbling, and

dreamed of God knows what. Like my father. . . . You have been about the same—verses, collections, suppers. But they're not cranks over there. . . . They're mathematicians, if anything. Speaking candidly, what do you and I need? A little money and plenty of repose. I am afraid Berty may be right—they'll rob us of both our money and our repose."

"The Communists?"

"I don't know. . . . The Germans, perhaps. The play is for high stakes, and you and I are only small counters. The Russians put me into such a state that I frightened Léontine. She met me with the welcome news that our cottage in Bidart was almost finished and that we could go there in the autumn. I answered her: 'Yes, if we live to the autumn.' Silly, of course, the more so that she has been very nervous lately. . . . Listen, Maurice, you must come to Bidart. It is a simple cottage in the Basque style—right on the shore."

He talked about Bidart. Then Lancier told him about the new play by Cocteau. Then they had a vermouth and soda, smiled, and said no more about Berty's croaking.

In the evening Lancier spoke to Marceline:

"I wanted to tell you yesterday. . . . I must make one condition—not a word to anybody! It was Berty who gave me the money, law of friendship—those were his own words. He riled me with his arguments, but still, he's a gentleman. He is more of a Frenchman than he himself thinks. Only I beg of you—don't let it slip out. I promised him that it would remain *entre nous*. And don't tell Mado. . . ."

Marceline listened to her husband's story with indifference: after he had told her that he had broken with Roy she ceased to have any interest in the affairs of Roche aîné. She was absorbed in her own thoughts.

"Why should I suddenly begin to initiate Mado into your business affairs? It's difficult enough to talk to her as it is now. . . ."

Lancier was alarmed:

"What's the matter with her? Is she sick?"

"No, she's not sick. . . . I don't know really. . . . That's the mood she's in now."

"Haven't you asked her?"

"I've told you—she won't talk. When I asked her, she said there was nothing the matter with her. . . ."

For some reason Marceline recalled her own girlhood, the summer night when, in the pouring rain, wearing the old housekeeper's long dress, she ran away from home to go to Maurice. But Lancier undressed, wound up his watch, and yawning with zest, began to soothe his wife:

"You are putting yourself out for nothing, Marceline. What can happen to Mado? Thank God, she's protected against the kind of troubles I've had. She's still a child. . . . That means that she has either fallen in love, has quarrelled with somebody, or that her landscape has not come out right and she has decided that she has

no talent. A slight ruffle on the surface of the waters and that's all. Sad today, gay tomorrow. At her age it always seems as though the clouds are gathering, but the storm never comes. The storms come later, when a man, at last, longs for repose. We've had a good life together, Marceline, and now we are enjoying a real Indian summer. I only hope there'll be no storm!"

* 11 *

Roger Sembat was tidying up his studio; he was doing it very clumsily, he broke a bowl, stained the couch with paint, and then, dipping a sock in turpentine, vigorously rubbed the upholstery, swept the dust under that same couch, which was the only furniture in the room, except for an exceedingly high table littered with junk, and a stool. His canvasses, the shelves, and the old clothing hanging on a nail were coated with a thick layer of dust. For some reason Sembat carefully blew a feather from the couch and burst out laughing. How silly—like in an old melodrama: the artist waiting for the princess. . . .

He looked round the studio with surprise, as if he had just realized that he lived there: and yet he had lived there for many years, knew every stain on the walls; those stains now gave him pleasure and now made him angry when he seated a model on the stool and the wall either came to life or, becoming obstinate, remained a blank space. But just now, as he glanced around the studio, he pondered over his life—how bleak, neglected and empty it was! He had not acquired a family as others had, he had no one to care for, and no one to care for him. How had this happened? . . . Not from inherent coldness—he possessed a tender and affectionate heart—and not from contempt for things mundane—it was enough to look at him to see that he was no ascetic—he was tall, broad-shouldered, with an inclination to stoutness, and his gestures were so sweeping that every place he entered at once became crowded, as if his presence filled the whole world: he ate slowly and with relish, and laughed with great gusto. If he remained single, it was only because one passion had ousted all others—so ardently and selflessly did he love art, disdain wealth and fame, and really live another life, a life of fantasy.

Many years ago he fell in love, very deeply, it seemed; the young woman liked him too; his friends were already inviting themselves to the wedding. But the wedding did not take place, and all because at that time he was painting the portrait of another woman, could not tear himself away from her auburn hair and exceedingly pale complexion, and failed to turn up at a rendezvous, with the result that his ladylove found herself another man. He lay in torment all through the night asking himself how this had happened, but in the morning he started on another portrait of that auburn-haired woman, whom, in his heart, he hated.

He was known in artistic circles in Paris as an original and serious artist, but was not widely known among the public—he did not strive for fame, he would not allow the critics to come near him, and besides, he worked too slowly to be remembered by frequenters of exhibitions. Sometimes he shared his thoughts with Mado; he would say: “Don’t think an artist depicts the world as he sees it, that he must perpetuate his own sensations. No, Mado, an artist is first of all a philosopher. Don’t frown, you too must become a philosopher, our thoughts are concretized in colour. Looking at the world we study it, delve into its meaning and produce not a reflection of what exists, but something new. It is true that the Greek sculptors portrayed their contemporaries, shared their ideas and their prejudices, and yet they created a new marble tribe. Plato is out-of-date. but the statue of Aphrodite is not, and never will be, out-of-date. . . . Understand. we do not depict the world, we fill it with inhabitants. . . .”

Sembat did not seem to notice the civil storms that were shaking Paris in those years. Sometimes he would enquire in surprise of the first person he met: “Who’s that shooting?” or “What’s this strike about?”

One day Lejean came to see him; he said that a secret war was raging in France, and that it would spread to the streets any day, that Sembat must choose what side to take in this war. Sembat listened attentively, and then showed Lejean his latest canvasses.

“Beautiful painting. But I was talking to you about the fate of the nation.”

“That’s exactly what I’m thinking about. In my opinion, painting that deals with anything else is not painting, but drapery. In all probability I’m doing what you are doing, only in a different way. I am, first of all, an artist. . . . But if it comes to a fight who knows. . . .”

For Mado he was her conscience, she eagerly went to him to get away from the glitter and nullity of Corbeille. She sensed the kind of heart that man possessed and confided all her spiritual troubles to him. But sometimes she asked herself: “Is he listening, or thinking how nice it would be to paint me in this dress? . . .”

Could Mado guess that she alone was capable of distracting his thoughts from painting? He himself had only recently realized what place she occupied in his life. He had known her when she was still a college girl and had watched her first attempts at painting. . . . His feelings matured slowly. Once he did not see Mado for several months—the Lancers were at Gelinotte, and life had seemed dull and even wearying to him. When he realized the cause of his depression he was dismayed: what a misfortune! Although he was too old for Mado, he was not so old as to sigh and draw interlocking initials! Enough! But his heart remained obstinate. In the past he had had casual connections with women as lonely as himself, ready to live with him for a brief space and uncomplainingly to depart. Now all women disgusted him, all except Mado. More than

once he pondered over the caprices of love. He was thirty-nine and Mado was twenty-four or twenty-five. She loved to dress well and, probably, yearned for success. She was the daughter of a rich factory owner, petted, and, moreover, good-looking. What had he become infatuated with? What was he dreaming of?

He had told Mado that he loved a Spanish woman he had met in Brittany, he had told her that because he feared that—in another minute he would betray his feelings. Mado sometimes asked him about that Spanish woman. He did not know what to say and would get angry.

She had promised to come at five o'clock. He had felt out of sorts since the morning and decided to tidy up his studio to relieve his feelings. While clearing the junk off the table he suddenly caught sight of a glove that belonged to Mado—she had left it there long ago, in the winter, when she had come to pose for him. He stroked the suède and fumed: What a farce! This must end! . . . But suppose she too? . . . Can one read another's heart? On New Year's Eve she had said: "You are more than a friend to me." . . . Of course, fourteen years—is no joke. But how many times had he heard of such marriages? Foolish? Perhaps. But everybody is a fool in matters of this kind. . . .

Thus Sembat reflected until Mado came; and when she came he did not think, he only stood admiring her, sensed her presence, breathed it. Mado was unusually agitated, rearranged the books and raised clouds of dust, sat down and at once jumped up again, and in conversation passed from domestic news to the Bonnard Exhibition and from Bonnard to war. Sembat had never seen her in such a state before. Mado's agitation infected him, and he began to feel nervous. "I will tell her in a moment! . . ."

"Mado, do you understand what it means to be infatuated with another person? You pick up some silly thing associated with him and you gasp for breath. . . ."

She interrupted him:

"Leave off! I don't want to hear about it. Do you understand—I don't want to hear about it! . . ."

He turned away. They remained silent for a long time. Mado broke the silence first:

"Don't be angry, Roger, I am out of my mind today. Or scold me as you used to at one time, say that I am a dauber, that I am a rich man's daughter, and paint nosegays out of ennui. Do you remember? . . . Oh, how easy things were then! . . . Only don't get angry! You know, I remembered you yesterday when I was looking at Bonnard's pictures and thought to myself—how splendid! . . ."

Sembat calmed down and began to talk about Bonnard:

"When you look at his pictures you forget that there is such a thing as time; that is the difference between painting and poetry. . . ." He

smiled: "You have noticed, Mado, that even the exterior is different—poets resemble birds, artists resemble trees...."

She was not listening to him.

"Mado, what's the matter with you?"

"With me?"

"Yes, with you."

"I don't know. I do know, but it is not important. A trifle, like losing a bracelet.... Isn't it silly to cry over the loss of a bracelet? Tell me quickly that it is silly! I beg of you—scold me! It is not a bracelet I have lost...." There were tears in her voice, but she quickly regained her composure. "Roger, help me. I'm going out of my mind! It is so terrible, it is—right here, and I can't do anything about it. When we meet I say silly things...."

Sembat trembled: and so she too!... He stepped up to Mado and clumsily stroked her hand, as he had stroked her glove a little while ago. Several times he tried to say something, but could not. At last he said haltingly:

"Mado, I too am going out of my mind...."

She smiled trustfully:

"That is why I decided.... You have told me what happened to you in Brittany, you will understand. You alone can help me, you—my friend, my old, kind friend, I will tell you everything, I will tell nobody else but you. I thought it was only in novels that you fall in love at first sight. I thought—one had to know the person a long time and have long talks with him. Actually it is different.... At my first meeting I realized that this was—fate. Why, you were there.... Don't you remember how foolishly I behaved? I wanted to be rude to him, offend him, nay, more—wound him. But what am I to him? A madcap, a French girl—in their opinion a French girl is only a doll. And those were not wounds to him, but pinpricks, and he did not notice them. So it was yesterday. I met him at the exhibition. I told you I was thinking about Bonnard. It is not true! I talked to him about Bonnard, but I was thinking about something else—I am terrified at the thought that he is going away soon. I beg of you—ask him to come here, I must see him."

"But, Mado, how can I do that?" That is not what he wanted to say, but getting angry with himself, he growled: "What have I got to do with it?..."

But she was not listening.

"I must speak to him, plainly, without any silly pinpricks. Do you know what I told him yesterday? I told him that it is possible to love Russians, but impossible to love a Russian, because in their country everything comes wholesale—the steppes, the forests and people. How silly that was! I must speak to him. Perhaps he has no feeling for me, but I don't want him to despise me. If you don't ask him to come here, I will go to him."

Sembat thought: "I must dissuade her from this, talk to her about pride. The Russian may misinterpret her intentions. . . ." But glancing at Mado, at her feverish eyes, at her lips, which were still moving although she was not saying anything now, he answered softly:

"Very well, I'll ask him to come."

One lunatic cannot cure another. And besides, the disease is incurable. . . . Had he ceased to love Mado? The only thing he was afraid of now was that—she would soon go away. . . .

And Mado got up. She went away as agitated as she had come. Standing at the window Sembat saw her reach the street corner, go round the turning, come back, stand for a moment and go on again, as though she did not know where to go.

He stood at the window for a long time overcome by a feeling of great and unremittent grief. Everything that had to be said had been said, he could now forget about the Spanish woman. . . . The Russian was younger, and above all he was alive, not infected with this. . . . And Sembat glanced in horror at his pictures. One of them held his attention, he stepped closer to it. It was a landscape he had painted the year before when Mado had gone to Gelinotte. . . . But what a daub! . . . The tree was unfinished. . . . Why did she talk to the Russian about forests? It's an old tree, God knows how old, but it is standing. . . . They have strong roots. . . . But even a tree is felled. . . . He must paint that tree over again, not like this, a real tree. . . .

Dusk set in. Newspaper boys were shouting in the street, then loving couples whispered beneath the window, then the street became deserted. Bitterly, but calmly, Sembat reflected: at forty one does not commit suicide for love. And even if he was being pushed out of life, he had another life, where it was not necessary to propose and be rejected, that life is not given, it is made—by passion, pain, wisdom, it is—art.

* 12 *

Somehow, Sembat and Sergei became friends at once. Sergei sat with outstretched legs on a stool that was too low for him, and when a picture pleased him he smiled, but said nothing.

Sembat asked him what the country was like in Russia. Sergei told him about the steppes and the forests.

"One doesn't want to paint the landscape in our country, but to sing it, it flows and, like music, it is elusive. You look—and it seems as if there is nothing there, but suddenly the sun breaks through the clouds and lights up a strip of field, or a little girl is walking along a field path, or everything becomes dark, presaging a storm—and how enchanting it is! And the blizzards! And the silence—after all, that too is music. . . ."

"I look at you," said Sembat, "and all the time I'm thinking to myself, why would it be so difficult to paint you? You have just explained this yourself—your face is like the landscape in your country, it is constantly changing, I see not a shape, but an expression. It would be hellishly difficult to paint your portrait, but I'd like to have a try. . . . Are you staying in Paris long?"

Before Sergei had time to answer there was a knock at the door. It was Mado. She said in a tone of surprise:

"You have a visitor, Sembat?"

She greeted Sergei in a friendly way, but with reserve. Sergei felt embarrassed at first. Then the awkwardness of the first few minutes passed off and an animated conversation ensued. What did they not talk about! About the fairs in Brittany and the quiet rivers in Russia along which logs of felled trees floated, about Ronsard's sonnets, full of happiness with a slightly mournful touch, about sweet wine which left a bitter aftertaste, and about Frenchmen saying about a man who becomes maudlin after heavy drinking that "he's had sad wine," and that in the North they have white nights in the summer.

"Now that's where I'd like to live," said Mado. "One can dream there. . . . Don't look at me like that! I know everybody works in your country. I too would work—in the daytime. But at night. . . . Isn't it wonderful to see the world different from what it is in the daytime! I suppose everything is different on a white night—houses, the sky, people."

"And then comes winter—when it's dark all the twenty-four hours round."

"That doesn't matter. . . . It would be happiness to live in another world at least for an hour. . . ."

"You live in that other world—when you are at work," said Sembat.

"What am I as a painter? A pupil. I shall be swotting over the ABC for another ten years. But I want to create something of my own now, without waiting all that time, even if it is frail, unreliable, but something into which I can put my whole soul. . . ."

Sembat looked at her in surprise: that is how he had known Mado a long time ago. He recalled a comical incident during her school days. The girls in her class were given an essay to work on, "The Sense of Duty in the Works of Corneille." Mado wrote about a star, which, on catching sight of an astronomer in love, swooned, and the star was presented with a ball dress with a long train, because it was more convenient to swoon when wearing a long dress; the dressmaker looked for the star, but couldn't find it, because it had long been transformed into gold dust, and only the astronomer remembered that a comet had swept across the sky. . . . "What nonsense!" exclaimed the teacher indignantly. Mado explained: "I read about a falling star in one of Corneille's books. . . ." That was eleven years ago, but Mado was still the same. . . .

There was a bunch of wild flowers on the table. Mado asked:

"Do they tell fortunes with daisies in your country?"

"Of course. 'He loves me—he loves me not, in his arms he'll take me, to the devil he'll send me.'"

"That's better than what we say. French girls try to bargain with their hearts: 'A little, much, madly.' 'A little. . . .' I think 'to the devil he'll send me' is better. Tell me those words in Russian."

Sergei told her: "K chortu poshlyot."

"Don't pull the petals off those flowers, Mado, you'll spoil my still life."

She sang an old Roussillon song. She had a low, weak voice.

*A soldier had been in the wars ten years,
And after roaming all over the world,
He, one night, to his home returned.
His wife looked and took him for a stranger,
In her eyes the stranger found favour,
And she kissed him and hugged him with ardour.
The soldier felt chagrined and glad.
Soldier, you have now found bliss!
Soldier, bliss now gives you a miss!
Your wife is now laughing at you,
With you she's unfaithful to you.
Kill her he cannot—he loves her.
Forgive her he cannot—he'll remember.
The soldier at dawn. . .*

"I don't want to sing any more."

"But what did the soldier do?"

"He went away. Perhaps it was not his wife; he may have embraced a strange woman; perhaps he is roaming over the world to this day. . . ."

The only thought that occupied Mado's mind now was: if only Sembat would leave the room! Only for a minute! . . . Can't he guess? She had something to say to Sergei. . . . What she had to say she did not know, but she knew—she must say something to him.

"Sembat, dear, if you boil the water, I'll make coffee. All right?"

Sembat at last understood and went to the tiny kitchen. Mado asked Sergei:

"When are you leaving?"

"I don't know. Soon, I think."

It seemed to her that it was not she who was speaking—it was the voice of a stranger:

"It's a good thing you are going soon. Otherwise your friends might think that you have fallen in love with Paris."

He shrugged his shoulders. How unbearable she was! And charming. . . . What was it about her that had captivated him? Perhaps her unworldliness, the mournful gaiety that hovers over Paris like a light summer mist?

"Have I offended you?"

"Oh no! What you said about your country was most interesting. I'm very grateful to you, very. . . ." She got up. "Sembat, where have you got to?"

On reaching the kitchen door she turned round towards Sergei and with a comical grimace repeated the Russian words she had learned, "K chortu poshlyot."

"Sembat, where's the kettle? What have you been doing here?"

"I thought you wanted. . . ."

"I want coffee. Go and attend to your visitor. I'll do everything myself."

Half an hour passed. Sembat decided to go and see what had happened to the coffee. He found Mado in tears.

"Go away! No, wait. . . . Tell him I'm feeling bad, that I've had a heart attack. Think up something. I can't go out to him. I can't. . . ."

That night Sergei slept badly: he kept thinking of Mado. What had he done to repel her? But perhaps she is laughing at him? No, people don't play like that. . . . But why does he think of her all the time? That girl, uninvited, without the rights that long friendship gives, without heart-to-heart talks, without ardent embraces, an alien, an alien in the true sense, had entered his life, had become so dear to him, so much his own, that he converses with her, questions her, soothes her. . . . He turned over from side to side, fumed at himself, but still kept thinking of Mado. And suddenly he laughed: he remembered how comically she had said in Russian "k tshortu."

In the morning he was handed a small blue envelope.

"I behaved badly again yesterday. Don't be angry. I am suffering for it. You said that there are Juliets in your country who cannot find the words with which to express themselves. I too am a mute Juliet, only a French one. I cannot and do not want to enter your life, all I ask of you is—meet me, perhaps I shall be able to say to you what I want to say. I will wait for you at eight o'clock this evening on the Quais Voltaire, near the monument. If you cannot, or don't want to come, I shall not be offended, I shall speak to you from afar. I have chosen that place because there are few people there at that time and we shall be able to talk. Excuse the scrawl. I am hurrying and I don't want to rewrite it. Mado."

The rain was coming down in a fine drizzle. Sergei arrived at the embankment before the appointed time; Mado was waiting for him. They talked rapidly about the rain, about Voltaire, about Sembat's pictures—both tried to conceal their agitation. They walked along,

now very slowly and haltingly, as if they did not know the way, and now rapidly, and an onlooker might have thought that they were hurrying somewhere; but they did not know where they were going. They crossed to the right bank and reached Place de la Concorde, which glittered like a ball room; they walked to the Champs-Élysées, blinking their eyes at the lights and not noticing the passers-by; then they found themselves in the Bois de Boulogne. As a rule there were many strollers here, but the rain had driven them all away. They walked down a deserted avenue, the smell of damp grass, of autumn, filled the air. They had managed to tell each other everything it seemed, but not a word did they utter about what filled their hearts. They had to talk because they were afraid to remain silent: but the talk was exhausted; only the patter of the rain on the leaves was heard.

Mado stopped, looked at Sergei, silently shrunk away as if she saw something terrible in his eyes, and then as silently rushed towards him, threw her arms round his neck and kissed him. He remembered nothing, he only kept repeating softly: "Mado. . . Mado. . ." Tears mingled with raindrops rolled down her face.

"After all, I did not say what I wanted to say. . ."

"What?"

"What I said just now. . ."

And so their love commenced. After this they met almost every evening. Nobody knew about this. They often said spiteful things to each other, quarrelled, made it up, but even these quarrels were particles of their great and complete happiness.

* 13 *

There was no such thing as minor affairs for Schirke—everything he did, he did with the utmost zeal. The publication of a guide to the ancient cities of Germany was intended to increase the reputation of the Europe Travel Bureau and prove to the French that the Germans were not contemplating war. Schirke decided that the guide-book would make a better impression if a Frenchman wrote an introduction to it. He picked on Nivelles—a French Nationalist, a man with an untarnished reputation and, in addition to all that, a poet of great refinement.

Schirke tried to master *Le Masque de Circé*.

*Persephone the night will not behold,
The voices of the sirens not subdue.
In the golden morn. her palms,
Fragile like ice, to the sun
Will fail to raise.*

He threw the book aside with mixed feelings of envy and contempt. This dual feeling had never left him all the time he had been in France. He had lived in Paris for four years as manager of the Travel Bureau and, in addition, carried out a number of special commissions. He had studied France and had more than once told his fellow countrymen that that country was deserving of contempt. What backwardness, what flabbiness! Shortsighted nonentities absorbed in the quest for gain, or in petty pleasures, venal newspapers, ephemeral governments, insouciance elevated to a cult. In his heart of hearts, however, Schirke envied the French, he admired their witty repartee, the elegance of the Parisian grisettes, the gaiety of the crowds and, of course, the cooking. Yes, these people know how to live! And while admiring he constantly asserted to himself that any German was superior to these connoisseurs and gourmets.

"Pretty," he said to himself concerning Nivelle's lines, "but silly and useless. . . ."

Rudolf Schirke did not trust the novices in the party: he became a Nazi ten years ago, when the outcome of the struggle still hung in the balance, and he tenderly recalled those times—his escape from the police station, false identity papers, exchange of shots with the Communists, smoke-laden beershops, where between a glass of beer and a game of billiards the future re-division of the world was discussed.

In his youth Schirke's career had been erratic. He dreamed of becoming a lawyer, but instead, he was obliged, as the agent of the Prima firm, to persuade impoverished commercial men to buy adding machines. He had spent his evenings reading Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche and Spengler, had told himself that loneliness was—the lot of the chosen, and had prayed for the hand of buxom Emma who, however, soon married a wealthy Swede. Schirke tried his hand at journalism, wrote reviews of theatrical first nights for the evening newspapers, but six months later that red-haired, freckle-faced Katz arrived on the scene and squeezed him out of his job. A Landtag deputy engaged him as his secretary. The deputy used to yell: "Rudolf, run and get some cigars. . . ." Schirke married a fright, the daughter of a haberdasher. And again fate jeered at him—his father-in-law went bankrupt, unable to withstand the competition of the big department stores, and his wife turned out to be avaricious, stingy and a shrew. Schirke was on the verge of despair when his former school chum Grimm, whom he met accidentally, said to him: "The whole of Germany, like you, is on the brink of a precipice. . . . We must give the people back their faith. There is a man who can do that. I will show him to you."

Although there were no more than a hundred followers in the hall, Hitler spoke very loudly, flung his arms forward and looked

over the heads of the audience as if he saw something that was hidden from them. As he listened to him, Schirke realized that his life was hard not because he was stupid, or lazy. He recalled how, when a boy, he had marked on the map the French towns that had been captured, and how later, when the vanquished army returned home, a wounded soldier had shouted: "Shame! We were betrayed by the people at home." He also recalled the years when well-dressed foreigners strolled along the Kurfürstendamm buying up pictures, furs and jewels. At that time Schirke hadn't the money for a glass of beer. . . . He might have become a brilliant journalist, but that sly Jew sneaked into his job. The Landtag deputy had treated him as if he were a valet. "Germany, wake up!" shouted Hitler. And Schirke felt as if he had really awakened after a night of frightful dreams. He became one of the most fervent supporters of the Nazi movement.

When Hitler triumphed, Schirke did not, like many others, dream of getting a soft job: for him the struggle still continued. He was delighted when he was entrusted with an important job abroad. By no means a dull man, he soon put himself on a friendly footing with the French: in Paris he was regarded as a rather indifferent Nazi and a friend of France. As such he was introduced to Nivelle.

"I will explain to you why I attach so much importance to this little book. We are living in troubled times, and the politicians—both yours and ours—are behaving rather recklessly. We must show that men of art recognize no frontiers. I cannot understand why the party congresses are held in Nuremberg. It is a museum city, a pearl of Gothic art! I remember your poem about Rouen, I am convinced that you can feel the soul of Nuremberg. And what about Weimar? This, then, is the best answer that can be given to those who try to depict Germany as a land of robots. We shall all agree on one thing: the cult of Goethe. Who can lead the French people into the world of Werther better than you? . . ."

"People nowadays are even afraid to go to Deauville. Who will go to Germany?"

"Mon cher maître, that is a fog, it will soon be dispelled. And a book is not a newspaper. . . . I am convinced that thousands of your fellow countrymen will want to visit the old German towns next year."

"I myself did not believe that war is possible, but people who come from Germany say that a bellicose mood prevails there. . . ."

"It may seem so to a superficial observer. . . . After all, compared with the French, we are rough and unpolished. Our people love to shout, to march and to play at soldiers."

"A dangerous game! We are very peacefully inclined, and we hate marching, even in parades. But if the lunatics get the upper hand in your country . . . well, the French can fight."

"We know and appreciate that. Of course, there are hotheads in my country. The Führer has to reckon with the tub-thumpers. But he—is an ex-soldier, he knows what war is, and will not permit war. During these anxious days I have reread your *Le Masque de Circé*. It takes ages and ages of culture for a country to be able to produce poets like that. We can only dream about it. . . . Your introduction will help those Germans who advocate the unity of our western civilization. Let the lunatics brandish their weapons, but the French poet Nivelle writes about the wisdom of Goethe, about Dürer's old cottage, and about Hoffmann's whims."

After seeing Nivelle out, Schirke laughed: a refined fish and nothing more. . . . He has polish, that cannot be denied. . . . But there was nothing surprising about that—they have been devilishly lucky, these pampered sons of history—vineyards, Nice, a gold reserve, the Louvre, and almost half of Africa. . . . It will soon be different though. It's a charming country, of course, nobody thinks of destroying it, God forbid! Only, we shall not be the ones to bow here. people will bow to us, that's it! . . .

Nivelle looked at his watch, it was too early to go to the Prefecture. . . . He sat down on the terrace of a café and became lost in thought. Schirke was courteous, but rather stupid. They are as naive as children, and that was the secret of Hitler's success. There was even something childish in Hitler himself—he was a depraved child. . . . It is dangerous, of course, for children to have matches. . . . The Germans have no sense of proportion, Schirke was right when he said that they were—rough and unpolished. Still, they were not Bolsheviks, they were people who belonged to our culture. He recalled Vlahov and made a grimace. That one wouldn't think anything of setting fire to the whole of Europe. Without the least trace of irony he called his Communist girls "Juliets." During the Paris Commune "Juliets" like these poured kerosene over the treasures of the past. Is it really possible that they will triumph? If they do, it will be the end of everything—of Goethe, Racine, and of us. . . .

"How do you do, Monsieur Nivelle!"

"Damn! Why did he have to go and sit at this table!"—It was Lejean sitting next to him. Nivelle reluctantly answered the greeting and the conversation was half-hearted. It was only towards the end, when Lejean referred to the Moscow negotiations, that he burst out.

"The Russians want to drag us into war and keep out of it themselves. But we are not children."

"I think it's the other way round—it's the English who are dragging, and we are dragging. . . . And the Russians are also not children, they have no intention of fighting for us."

Both fell silent. Lejean twirled a blue syphon, and the syphon hissed like a human being. Nivelles felt that his calmness was oozing out. Vlakhov is a Russian and one can understand him, but this man—is a Frenchman, and yet he argues like Vlakhov, looks only to Moscow and believes only the Russians. It is simply awful! They have split the nation into two. They are a hundred times worse than the Germans! Well, what can Hitler do? Seize Danzig, and perhaps another clot of earth somewhere.... But these are aiming at what is the most important—at the soul, at France, at art.

On taking his leave Lejean said in a conciliatory tone:

"Well, we'll see which of us is right. Everybody is waiting to see how this will end.... My wife has not gone to Brittany—she is afraid there will be war...."

Putting restraint on himself, Nivelles answered calmly:

"It is not—will there be war? War is already going on, it started in nineteen thirty-four, I don't know how long it's going to last, there has been a Seven Years' War and a Hundred Years' War, hasn't there? But one thing is clear—the French can't fight the Germans because the French are fighting the French. So your wife can go to the seaside without any fear. It looks as though the weather has settled...."

* 14 *

Crowds poured out of the Metro; people were hurrying to the theatres and the cinema; there were crowds of idlers; foreigners—English, Czechs and Swedes—stood gazing in wonder at the people, the houses and the lights; vendors of newspapers, plans of the city and obscene postcards, darted among the crowd. Sergei did not notice Mado appear at his side. They walked on silently, while all around them everything glittered and whirled—the fiery letters of the advertisements, walking sticks, hats, small crimson roses.

They reached a broad quiet boulevard, and it looked as though an empty bench was waiting for them—the haven of old women who knitted in the daytime, and of loving couples who for hours repeated to each other, over and over again, the old stereotyped but nevertheless thrilling nonsense, an ordinary bench under an ordinary chestnut tree.

"When are you leaving, Sergei?"

"Why do you keep on asking me that?"

"You know why. But it's all the same to you...."

"It has become a sort of a game with you—to say it's all the same to me."

"And it has become a game with you to say nothing."

"I can go if I bore you."

"Sergei!"

"What?"

"Nothing...."

From an open window the sounds of a radio reached them; somebody, for the thousandth time, was singing in a husky voice:

All's well, Madame la Marquise....

"I can't bear to hear about that Marquise!..."

"I suppose in your country they sing: 'All's well, comrade tractor driveress....' Is that better?"

"Why are you trying to pick a quarrel?"

"I?"

"Yes, you. You ask me to talk to you about Moscow and then you get riled."

"Perhaps I'm jealous. I'm only a foolish girl, am I not?... But when you talk to me about your country I believe you. I suppose there is much that is good there—the factories, houses, benches in the park, shoes...."

"Not at all, the shoes are bad."

"Wait, you won't let me finish.... There is one thing you haven't got—that's art. That's because you want to put everything into life. Instead of art you have statistics—so many pictures, so many books."

"You don't know what you are talking about...."

"Yes, I do. You even want to push love into life."

"I don't want anything.... It's you that keeps on asking: 'And what else?'..."

"Why don't you trust me?"

"I don't trust myself. Do you know why France is falling to pieces? You are too easygoing with yourselves."

"You may abuse France to your heart's content, I don't mind. When you talk about yourself you talk simply. But as soon as your country is mentioned you get up on stilts. Do you know what makes Soviet people repulsive to me? Their smugness."

"You are wrong. We are not smug, but we have faith in ourselves. You have no faith in yourselves."

"Faith? What for?..."

"To live."

Suddenly Mado said in a different tone of voice, very softly:

"But suppose it is impossible to live? Sergei, will you take me with you?"

He made no reply. They got up and walked on quickly, as if they were afraid of being late. But when they had gone about a hundred paces they came up to another bench under another chestnut

tree, the leaves of which shaded them from the bright lamppost: Mado was grateful to the tree—she did not want Sergei to see her eyes just then.

"Mado, I have two lives, one—is my own, the real life, the other—is you."

"I don't want to enter your life. I don't want to be a hindrance to you. But if you go away..."

A woman stopped near them and cried out in a hoarse voice: *Paris Soir!* Sergei ran to the lamppost with the paper.

"Pardon me, but things are moving so quickly now..."

She laughed a joyless laugh:

"Good God, how different we are! It's really a disaster—tree and wind... You see me laughing, but I really want to cry. But it is funny, awfully funny—a tree and the wind... Were you really born in Paris? You are quite different, as if you were born on Mars."

"Why on Mars?"

"I don't know. It's a warlike name..."

"Yes, war is coming, and soon too."

"I try not to think about it."

"'All's well, Madame la Marquise'... And then a bomb will drop on Madame la Marquise, and on this bench..."

"Does the prospect please you?"

"I'm terribly anxious—about Paris, about you. You—like Paris—are alien and yet mine, gay and unhappy, very clever and very foolish. What is going to happen to you? ... You are so... defenceless..."

"And you?"

"I?... Life is different in our country. We have grown accustomed to a great deal. We will stand it."

"Stand what?"

"Everything."

"I will not be able to stand parting with you..."

They got up and climbed the steep streets of Montmartre. They held hands, like little children. Now and again the bright light of shop windows or restaurants lit up their tense and seemingly petrified faces. Then the city became quiet, provincial; somebody was weeping in the dark; a young woman adjusted her stocking and ran on; a tramp was sitting in the road hugging an empty bottle. The stars became visible. Mado was breathing hard; the palm of her hand was cold. And at last Paris was revealed to their view, all enveloped in an orange-coloured mist, it surged and rumbled like the sea.

Sergei felt the touch of a cold palm on his cheek; Mado asked softly:

"Why don't you want happiness?"

He did not answer. Instead, he tenderly, reverently, pressed the hand and kissed the palm. A cat meowed. The drunkard was singing in the dark:

Darling, don't sing now. . . .

Sergei began to speak in a low, halting voice, as if he were reading an indecipherable letter:

"I will tell you about old Paris, as if I had lived there then. . . . The city was the same—and yet different, the same houses and cafés, but the people laughed differently—more gaily. And there were many poets. Fiacres—they pulled the blinds down and kissed. . . . Jaurès talked about the early advent of brotherhood. . . . But instead came Verdun. . . . But I've got off the track; that's not what I wanted to talk about. . . . Well, to that Paris came a young Russian woman, almost a girl, she had spent the year before that in prison. Can you picture the change—prison, gendarmes, snowdrifts, and suddenly Paris. . . . She was a modest young woman. . . . I don't know how it happened, but she made the acquaintance of a young Frenchman, he was a student, wrote poetry. They strolled through the streets, as you and I do, only—it was Shrovetide Carnival, so much confetti that your feet sank into it like snow, harlequins and pierrots. . . . The young woman was to leave Paris next day—she was being sent to Russia with 'literature.' He loved her, or thought he loved her, which is all the same, and wanted to detain her. He said: 'Why do you renounce happiness?' She answered: 'There are different kinds of happiness, some people have one kind, some another.' That's the whole story."

"Did she go?"

"Next day. . . . She returned a year later, but they never met again."

Mado was trembling all over, she spoke stammeringly, catching her breath:

"You have taken leave of your senses, Sergei! Tell me plainly, are you leaving tomorrow? Don't torture me! Why did you invent all this?"

"I didn't invent anything. My Mother told me this. . . ."

Neither of them could say any more. And the drunkard bawled again:

Oh do not sing, all's understood

Without song. . . .

Paris had vanished in the mist. It seemed as though love had vanished too. Then Mado kissed Sergei, and suddenly both were overcome with childish joy. They ran down the hill to the streets where the lights of the last bars still open gleamed feebly. They drank coffee at a stall among revellers, taxi drivers and workers—day dawned. Sergei said:

"You look very pale. But your eyes are glowing, your eyes are living separately from you, they are from a different play..."

She laughed in reply. He bought a bunch of gilly flowers, and they exhaled the fragrance of summer, childhood, happiness. They parted as if they had not gone through a night of torment. Only when Mado got into bed, still not thinking of anything, happy, did the tears rush to her eyes—"He's going away and will not take me with him..." As she dozed off she consoled herself with the thought: "A bomb will drop—on Paris, on that bench, on me..."

* 15 *

Professor Dumas' maid, rosy-cheeked Marie, was a chatterbox: at the greengrocers, or in the conciergerie, she prattled:

"When I was applying for the place they told me: he's absent-minded, all taken up with his thoughts, no matter how you cook you'll not hear a word of complaint from him. But what do you think? The guests might not notice it, but if the mutton is just slightly overdone he's sure to say in a whisper: 'Well, Marie, we have disgraced ourselves...' He'll pour out some wine, twirl the glass, hold it up to the light and drink as if he was rinsing his mouth. He's sixty-four, but you should see him dance! He went out shooting, brought home a brace of partridges, his clothes were all in mud, it took me three days to clean them. There was a man like that in our village—a lively old boy, at sixty-seven he took a young wife and at the wedding he drank all the guests under the table. But he was a countryman, as for my master, I will never believe he is a learned scholar!..."

In her heart, however, Marie worshipped the professor: he was jovial, never uttered an offensive word, and when he had guests for dinner he would call her into the dining room and say: "Let's drink to our sorceress, she deserves it for the sauce alone." ... Today she was braising meat in red wine—the professor said to her: "Some foreigners are coming, see that you don't disgrace yourself." ...

Although Marie assured everybody that her master was "not a learned scholar but a wag," Professor Dumas was famous even beyond the borders of France. One can understand the pleasure Johann Keller felt when Dumas said to him: "I have read your book. There are some debatable points in it, but you've done a good job of work!... Are you here alone? With your wife? That's splendid, come with her on Friday and have lunch with me."

When Keller saw Dumas in his domestic surroundings he was amazed: he had never imagined that a great scientist lived like that.

At lunch the host talked rapturously about Charlie Chaplin, then he instructed his guests how to make onion soup, calling Marie in as expert advisor, and suddenly he began to tell comic stories from Marseilles, laughing heartily over them himself and wiping the tears from his eyes with his serviette. Keller treated all this with the utmost respect, and so great was his awe of Dumas that he even thought his anecdotes were witty.

He was a blond, wore large dark eyeglasses, was very polite and shy: Dumas kept filling his glass with chablis in the hope that his guest would thaw, but in vain—Keller was always like that. He had never been naughty as a child; the sight of a broken cup or torn pants offended him, he preferred books to boisterous games. And later, as a youth, he kept aloof from his college mates; some students went on the spree, played cards and enticed the rosy-cheeked waitresses away from each other; others were keen on politics, shouted that the Communists and Jews must be exterminated and that Germany should seize the "Corridor," Alsace and so forth; but Keller dreamed of the quiet life of a scientist in a neat little town where the lime trees blossomed, girls smiled shyly over geranium pots, and old men leisurely smoked their last pipes before turning in. Soon the Nazis came into power; Keller remained indifferent to this event: what had an anthropologist to do with the conflicts of parties? Brüning or Hitler, it was all the same. . . . He had his sphere, books.

Gerda was engaged to Keller for four years: they met in pastry shops, strolled in the park, and sometimes they kissed. He was not in a hurry to get married: he wanted to get onto his feet first, and besides, he wanted to test the durability of their feelings. It seemed to him that he had learned all there was to know about Gerda, but he proved to be mistaken. Before she was married she was distinguished for her dreaminess, she was slim and shy, and sighed with joy or tenderness. But after she became Frau Keller and had had two children Gerda grew stout and her character changed—she became masterful. She believed that her husband was ill-adapted to the struggle for life, she was convinced that everybody was cheating him and, conscious of her responsibility for her children's future, she gave Keller no peace; he dared not leave the house without a woollen scarf round his neck, he was obliged to go to the deacon to enquire about his aunt's health, and be the first to pay his contribution to the "Winter Aid Fund."

When Keller set out to write his book on "Some Distinctive Racial Features of the South American Indians" Braun had said: "This is a ticklish subject in the present times. . . ." Gerda grew alarmed at this and began to urge her husband to choose another subject; but he was obstinate—he was infatuated with his work.

Professor Dumas had read Keller's book with interest, and had

ornamented the margins of his copy with question marks and exclamation marks.

Blue-eyed, full-busted Gerda involuntarily compared Professor Dumas with her husband. How young that Frenchman looked! Why, he was over thirty years older than Johann! Johann worked too hard, he did not know how to rest. . . . Look at him now. . . . Had it been worth while coming to Paris to spend whole days talking about Indians! An opportunity like this didn't come every year! How many times had she begged Johann to take her to the Folies-Bergère, but he kept putting it off. They were leaving in a week's time. It's a shameful thing to admit, but he has not even taken her to the top of the Eiffel Tower! . . . True, the Frenchman was very hospitable, but he gave one the impression of lacking staidness. Perhaps he wasn't as big a scientist as Johann thought he was: it was a nice dinner, but the furniture was wretched and the plates and dishes cheap. . . . An ordinary schoolteacher lives better than this in Germany. Strange that a scientist should tell such silly stories. But all the French people seemed to lack seriousness! And yet Napoleon was a Frenchman. . . . Perhaps they have degenerated, like this professor. . . . To roar with laughter like a bursche at his age, and with the fame he enjoyed! . . .

"Do you like Paris, Madame Keller?"

Her big breasts heaved.

"Oh, Monsieur Dumas, how can anybody not like Paris! I think it's the gayest city in the world."

Then, as if guessing her thoughts, Dumas said:

"Gay, it is true. But not only gay—Monsieur Keller knows that we can work too. I can't understand why certain nincompoops in your country talk about us with such disdain; they take a look at Montmartre and at once make up their minds—'degenerates'. . . ."

Dumas chuckled. How disgustingly he laughs—he grunts—thought Frau Keller. But her husband blushed and, coughing slightly, he said:

"You mustn't take notice of everything they write in our country. Politics. . . ."

"I know, I know! I don't allow politics to cross my threshold. Here, too, you take up a newspaper sometimes and you want to spit in disgust—such filth! . . . Only we are allowed to spit here, but in Germany. . . . It looks as though even spittoons are registered in your country—and you have regulations where to spit, and when."

"I assure you, Monsieur Dumas, that there are quite a lot of people in our country who are disgusted by this foolishness. . . . What must I feel when some people, for the sake of politics, try to belittle French culture? Why, I am so much indebted to you. . . ."

"And can you say openly that what they write is piffle?"

"Of course. And I say it among my friends."

"What do you mean 'among your friends'? Madame Keller? ... Well, you know, that's positively humiliating..."

"You must understand, Monsieur Dumas, that conditions are different in Germany. ... Our people are accustomed to internal discipline, they need moral blinkers. These blinkers are irksome to me, but my landlord goes into raptures over them, and so does my baker, and all my neighbours. For them the new order—means above all, order. I don't belong to the party myself, nor do I agree with their ideology. But to do them justice—they have abolished unemployment. ... As regards our field, although it touches upon the party's fundamental doctrine, we can continue our work as freely as before."

Dumas hurried to his study and returned with Keller's book.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute! ... You say you are able to work freely, don't you? Let's see. ... I'll find that page in a minute. ... Here it is! ... You give the blood groups of the Indians according to the data published in Santiago. That's very interesting and instructive! It turns out, then, that group O, which your jackasses glorify, constitutes ninety-one per cent among the Indians. But, mon ami, you stopped short there and did not go on to the end! I don't mean the deduction, I mean only the figures. They are on the next page, where you give the general figures. You give the figures of Ramm and Sokarras, but for some reason you omitted Lippschutz. If you are making a general summary how can you ignore the following fact: look, I have added it—group O—fifty-six among the arch-Nordic Icelanders and exactly the same, figure for figure, among the Yemen Jews!"

"I know those figures, but you can understand that I could not refer to them. ..."

"What do you mean, could not? What about Galileo—did he find it pleasant to be in prison? No, once you have taken to science, you must carry on to the end! It's not a game of cards where you can say 'I pass'..."

Seeing Keller's crestfallen face he stopped talking. "The devil possessed me! I gave him a fine lunch and now I'm spoiling his digestion. ..."

"All right. ... Let's drop the subject—Madame Keller must no doubt be weary of such discussions. After all is said and done, your book is an interesting one. And with the coffee I recommend this armagnac. ..."

And Dumas excelled himself: he was so jovial, so cordial, that he even charmed Frau Keller. She showed the professor photographs of her children, and Dumas remarked about five-year-old Rudi:

"He's going to be a sea captain. You'll see—he'll be a real seawolf!"

Frau Keller melted with tenderness. All would have gone well had not Anna Roth arrived. On seeing the guests she felt embarrassed:

"I have come only for a minute, Monsieur Dumas. You wanted to give me a book. . . ."

Dumas insisted that she should have a cup of coffee. She drank it in silence. The Kellers also remained silent. Wishing to break the ice Dumas said:

"This is a gifted scientist, Anna. And please don't think that he's a Nazi! He himself told me that there are lots of fools in Germany today. Just imagine, he is shackled even in his own special field! So you needn't be afraid. . . ." Turning to Keller he explained: "I'm saying this because Madame Roth has a bone to pick with your tub-thumpers. She is a Communist, and she was in Spain. You can talk quite openly in her presence. . . ."

Silence again ensued. At last Keller forced himself to say:

"They say that it's intolerably hot in Spain in the summer."

"Yes, it is very hot there in the summer."

Frau Keller got up:

"You will pardon us . . . but it is already half past four, and we promised to be home at four."

They drove to the hotel in silence; when they got to their room they had a serious talk.

"You are as simple as a schoolboy! I told you you ought to go and speak to Dr. Koenig before accepting the invitation. That old fool. . . ."

"What are you saying, Gerda? He's a big scientist."

"And a big fool. Now he will spread it around that you are opposed to the new order. As if you didn't know that all the French people are terrible chatterboxes! He deliberately invited that German Communist woman to come. He wants to get us into trouble. Haven't you got enough enemies as it is? They're only waiting for the opportunity to pay you out for your book. . . ."

"You are exaggerating. Professor Borhardt has expressed a very high opinion of it."

"Borhardt doesn't set the tone. And you know perfectly well that Klitsch has written a very severe criticism of it. If his article has not been published yet, it does not mean that it won't be published. They've only to get wind of how you have been behaving in Paris. . . . When one has children one must behave more carefully. You might lose everything."

"How was I to know that Dumas would talk politics?"

"You are as naive as Rudi. They all hate us. I am surprised you don't feel it! You can expect a trap at every step here. To meet a German Communist! . . . How do you know she's not involved in the murder of the Counsellor? . . ."

"But who could have foreseen this, Gerda?"

Frau Keller sat in a dark corner of the room and wept. Instead of providing pleasure for himself and her, Johann made awful acquaint-

ances. For talk like this alone he could be put into prison. And then there was that Communist woman. . . . Dr. Koenig had warned Johann that one must be on the alert here. . . . What would become of the children if Johann were thrown into the street? She recalled that Dumas had said that Rudi would be a sea captain. This no longer stirred her maternal feelings, it made her angry—the old clown! He had enticed her trustful Johann into a trap! . . .

"Listen, Johann, you must go and tell Dr. Koenig that you have met this Anna Roth at Dumas' house."

"In all probability her name is neither Roth nor Anna. . . ."

"That doesn't matter, describe her to him. She visits Dumas, and they can easily establish her identity. . . . If you have at least a grain of common sense left you will go to the Embassy at once. Dr. Koenig is there until six. . . ."

Keller sat for a long time in the large, bare waiting room. He was angry with his wife, with Dumas, with Dr. Koenig, with the whole world. How absurd and humiliating! He—a scientist, whose work had been highly appraised by both Borhardt and Dumas—was obliged to report like a "dick". . . . Disgusting! But it can't be helped. . . . You can't avoid keeping in touch with the Nazis. . . . Klitsch is only waiting for the opportunity. He claims that I am a Lamarckist. If I am not careful they will say I am a Marxist. . . . I have spent enough sleepless nights—waiting for the Gestapo men. . . . Gerda is right. . . . But how loathsome the whole thing is! . . . Dumas is at liberty to chatter to his heart's content, and yet he had the cheek to talk about Galileo! He wouldn't if he lived in Germany! . . . How do the French manage to arrange their affairs like this? The Germans are no worse, no more stupid than they. It was the French who drove Germany to despair with their "diktat." The French are to blame for Hitler's rise to power in Germany. . . . And they themselves are happy, eat, drink, and yet sneer at us. . . . What did he say to Dumas? Nothing terrible. He had even emphasized that this new order suited Germany. . . . Of course, anybody can always misrepresent what one has said. . . . As Klitsch did with his book. . . . And on top of all that there's this damned Communist woman! . . . He must tell, otherwise they may pin something on him. . . . But still, it is humiliating! . . .

After telling Dr. Koenig everything, Keller felt relieved: thank God it's over! . . . Dr. Koenig heartily shook hands with him:

"Thanks! You have acted like a true German. All this is extremely important. . . ."

Keller left the Embassy in a calmer mood. Whatever one might say, he was serving his country. And Germany—is Germany. . . . Why had it seemed humiliating? Prejudice! This is not a family affair, perhaps that woman really is a terrorist. . . . He had only performed his duty. . . .

And Keller fell into such a good mood that at last Gerda's dream came true: they went to the Folies-Bergère. Gazing at the half-naked girls, Frau Keller went into raptures at one moment and waxed ironic another. They danced gracefully, and were able to put themselves across. But one must indeed be a degenerate to fall in love with a woman whose haunches you couldn't even slap. . . . Lines and lines again, but where were the bust and hips? . . . That kind didn't live long. . . . But, still, it was jolly, and amazingly graceful. Everything was cruder in Germany. . . . She'd have something to tell when she got back to Heidelberg. It's a good thing poor Johann has had a little pleasure. He works so hard, and on top of it all there was this business. . . .

But Keller found no pleasure in gazing at the beauties on the stage. Everything floated past him in a mist: Dumas, the wine, Gerda's tears, Dr. Koenig. . . . He did not think about whether he had acted well or not well, he felt utterly weary, and wanted neither music, women nor wine.

That evening Dumas recalled Keller's crestfallen face. "Whatever made me say that? . . . It's hard enough for him as it is without my talking to him in that way. It's a charming new order, I must say! He cannot even quote all the data about group O. Nobody would tolerate that in this country. . . . But I'm sorry for Keller—he's a capable man, and honest, you can see that at once."

Marie grumbled:

"Was it worth going to all that trouble? The ragout, the béchamel. . . . Did you see the way he ate, Monsieur Dumas? He did not even feel the taste of what he was swallowing. And she's just a cow. And a bad-tempered one. Next time they come, all I'll give them is boiled potatoes, let them gobble that."

Dumas smiled:

"You're wrong. Marie, you're not being fair to them, they are nice people. But lunch with them is certainly a dull affair. . . ."

* 16 *

Only the evening before Mado had been happy; she and Sergei had roamed through the outskirts of Paris, had strayed into streets so narrow that they looked like crevices, had run out of them towards the lights in the squares, had gone to the fair, had listened to an old barrel organ, and Mado had her fortune told by the organ grinder's magpie. The ticket the bird drew out read: "Let your heart be appeased, the object of your love will not desert you." And although Mado had laughed at the words "object of your love," they had soothed her. Perhaps for this reason, or perhaps because the whole evening had been so translucent—they had not exchanged any spiteful remarks, they had had no

tiffs, she had not even asked Sergei whether he was leaving soon, as she usually did every time they met.

And now he was leaving. She was to see him soon for the last time. . . .

Sergei knew he was leaving soon, but still he was not prepared for the parting. He had often pondered over his feelings towards Mado and had tried to grasp what had drawn him to this young woman, with the complex and often contradictory variations in her moods, but the riddle remained unsolved. All he knew was that the life, which before had been full to the brim, seemed dark and empty when Mado went home. And yet Mado was outside his life, he had never talked to her about his work, had never talked to her about his hopes and anxieties; he had never asked her about Corbeille, about her friends, about her alien and to him unintelligible life. Perhaps all this was a fantasy? But he at once answered himself: No, he loved a living woman, knew her as if he had lived with her for many years, although he did not know either her cares or her friends.

And yet he had never once thought of the possibility of introducing Mado into his life. Conscious that their parting was drawing near, he vaguely consoled himself with the thought: it is impossible that they should never meet again! . . .

Only now did he suddenly ask himself: what was he doing? How many times had Mado repeated: "Take me with you." Why had he not heeded her, had not wanted to heed her? This will not occur again. . . . Mado was right—why was he renouncing happiness? . . .

But what would become of Mado in a country that was alien to her, without friends, without those small things of life which one becomes aware of only when they are lacking, and when they become a necessity? He knew what that meant, in Paris he had longed for the Moscow side-streets, for the lampposts round the Pushkin monument, for the songs, for a word, for trifles. . . . How could Mado live, connected with life only through him? He would be sent on a distant commission—and the thread would break. . . . He knew a life that was not what life seemed to be when listening to an organ grinder at a Paris fair. He was older, had experienced more, he must think for both. How could he tear Mado away from these lights, from her painting, from the gaiety and sadness of Paris? . . . Sembat had said that chestnut trees cannot be transplanted—they wither. . . .

But even to himself Sergei did not say the main thing. Ten years or so ago he had read a great deal, had been keenly interested in Tolstoy. Dickens and Stendhal; the heroes in novels seemed to him to be living personages, he knew them better than he knew his friends; every now and again, in the course of the day, he would return to this fanciful but real world. Perhaps Mado, too, was a wonderful book to him. They were not bound by the everyday affairs of life, which are like the blood

vessels. He loved Mado, he changed colour when he saw her, but even in his dreams he could not unite this woman with his life: Mado always remained outside of it. This was not because his sentiments were feeble, but because of Mado's spiritual nature; one day he said to her: "Sometimes it seems to me that when I say 'yes' you hear me say 'no.' You are made of different clay..." She was a warm, living, beloved being, but still, she remained a dream.

He did not utter the words that she was still waiting for. She tried to be strong, repressed her tears, did not ask him about anything. They reached the avenue where their love was born, stood amidst the golden hues of early autumn and went on further; long they roamed through the streets of their happiness, smiling at the trees, at the lampposts, and at the two shadows on the bluish pavement; they recognized the benches—here weeks, years, a lifetime had passed.... From a flower girl they knew Sergei bought Mado the last bunch of flowers, a bunch of tiny tea roses.

But towards the end they broke down, tried to deceive each other with words of hope.

"Perhaps I will come here again in the spring..."

"I will wait. But if it becomes too painful to you, send me a word. I will come. Promise that you will write..."

"Of course, I will. I know now that I will find it hard."

"Then—why?..."

"I don't know.... Mado, I cannot do otherwise.... Believe me. I am older than you and know life better.... Perhaps I am unable to explain, but it is so.... It is impossible now.... I shall certainly come back in the spring.... The chestnut trees will be in bloom, and suddenly I will see Mado—coming towards me in a green frock, for some reason I think it must be green.... I am convinced that we shall meet again soon...."

She shook her head.

"Why play hide-and-seek? ... Sergei, I want to tell you something very important. It is true that you are older and wiser than I am, I am ready to obey, you know everything. I have been living in a hothouse, as it were, while you have been working, fighting. But there is one thing I know better. Don't argue, I am a woman.... And I know this better than you do.... Perhaps we shall never see each other again. You will be living your own life. Don't think I am jealous, I am saying this as simply as saying that you will breathe, walk and talk. Another woman ... and she will live by your side, know all your affairs, share your joys and sorrows. But remember that there is Mado. Who knows, perhaps nobody will be dearer to you than I have been? And then you will feel this in a year's time, even in ten years' time. Don't reproach yourself for having left me, but remember everything, and you will feel better.... I am making no vows to you. How do I know what will happen

to me tomorrow? Perhaps I, too, will lead a different life. . . . But listen, Sergei, if I begin to go out of my mind with longing, try to hide from myself, bite my pillow at night, I will say: there is Sergei! Have you understood me? We have put so much heart into this! . . . And if there is anything in life that does not die. . . .”

She did not finish the sentence, she felt her strength giving way; she enquired what time the train was leaving.

The station was filled with the tumult and agitation that came from the high, vaulted, sooty roof, from the engine whistles, the rattling luggage trucks and other people's bustling, parting, sandwiches, handkerchiefs and shouting.

“Are there many in your compartment?”

“Yes.”

“How will you sleep?”

“I'll manage somehow. . . .”

“Sergei, do you remember: ‘in his arms he'll take me. . . .’ You must take your seat. . . . Let me hug you! . . .”

“Mado! . . .”

The lights of the station, the factories and the suburbs had already flashed past. But he was still standing at the window repeating: “Mado!” Then night came, such as one does not see in town, it vanquished the smoke with the odour of damp fields and stunned one with its blackness. Sergei tried to doze off, but could not, he thought of words to fit, in with the rhythmic clatter of the carriage wheels: endearing epithets and fragments of phrases. “In his arms he'll take me, to the devil he'll send me.” . . . But the wheels kept up their steady stroke. He fell asleep before dawn, only to wake again in a fright an hour later: What has happened? . . . He at once realized what it was: Mado was gone!

He knew that he could not rely upon the healing effects of time—he would have to live with this wound; he talked to his fellow passengers, agitatedly unfolded a newspaper—how were the Moscow negotiations going? He gazed at the neat but boring landscape of Germany. Then the fields of Poland stretched before him; he felt a twinge in the heart, they were the harbingers of Russia. Soon he would see peasants' huts, woods, daisies and bluebells, and fair-haired peasant girls! . . . In Negoreloye he almost flung his arms around a snub-nosed Red Army man who, after reading *Pravda*, commented: “Those Frenchmen have no solidity. . . .”

At last he was in Moscow, the sultry summer heat, the smell of asphalt, men in summer jackets carrying brief cases, urchins with their faces smeared with cherry juice, the house with the lions, the one that Pushkin mentions. . . . Sergei did not tell an untruth when he said to his mother: “You can't imagine how happy I am to be back. . . .” Only he did not add that the heart—was big, and that into his heart had entered for long, and perhaps forever, the shade of departed love.

Although Sergei had told Anna Roth that he did not like to go shopping, how could he come back from Paris without a present for Olga? His sister seemed to him to be a little girl. When Nina Georgiyevna asked him laughingly: "Why do you talk to her as if she were a child, she is cleverer than I am"—Sergei threw his head back, looked at his sister in surprise and answered: "She has grown. But she's little all the same..."

Olga had imperceptibly passed from adolescence to that sobriety of thought and feeling which, as a rule, comes with grey hairs. She was well-proportioned, tall, and had regular features; she reminded one of the portraits of boyars' daughters on old tea caddies, or on cigarette case lids. There was one thing she lacked, however, to make her charming—internal fire; her eyes were large, bright and fixed. It was probably because of this that many people thought her dull, although she did not lose herself in conversation and quickly grasped the point. She lived with her mother in a small room; it was a communal apartment, and the neighbours were hard to get on with; were it not for Olga they would have pecked Nina Georgiyevna to death; one of them spitefully said to her one day: "It would be interesting to know where your daughter got that foreign dress? Perhaps it's for your chirruping..." And Nina Georgiyevna had been so hurt that she could not sleep the whole night because of it. Olga was able to repel any attack. When her mother complained about people's rudeness, she shrugged her shoulders and said: "Abuse doesn't hurt me. But don't lend them the electric kettle again, you can't get another one like it now..."

Olga worked at the editorial office of a departmental newspaper. She had taken this job after long picking and choosing—she had gone about, had made enquiries and had compared the advantages of different jobs. She was an excellent worker, and everybody was pleased with her.

Everybody, except her mother... But who could tell what Nina Georgiyevna wanted? ... Surely, not suffering for her daughter! What made her uneasy about Olga, however, was precisely her profound complacency: she never tormented herself. They never quarrelled; everybody spoke of Nina Georgiyevna as an exemplary mother and of Olga as a tender and solicitous daughter. There was a great love, and a great estrangement, between them.

In the endeavour to understand Olga, Nina Georgiyevna recalled her own girlhood, but the key did not fit the lock. And besides, they were much too different—the mother, passionate, sensitive, ready for any sacrifice, and even-tempered Olga, protected from the blows of life if not by indifference, then by serenity. At the age of twenty Nina Georgiyevna had thirsted to sacrifice her life for the cause of freedom, had

regarded it as a high honour to deliver a packet of leaflets, and had copied excerpts from *Capital* and verses by Nekrasov in an exercise book. How could she understand Olga, who dreamed of smart dresses and who, after reading a book would say "it's interesting," or "it's dull," and at once forget what she had read? Nina Georgiyevna answered herself: times are different, they don't have to fight. . . . Olga is not a bad girl, she can feel pity and assist people, she would never do anything low, and she does her work not only for the sake of money, she herself says—if you undertake a thing, do it properly. . . . Why then was she displeased with her daughter? Perhaps her heart had become petrified and refused to understand another's youth?

Once Olga had tried to explain to Sergei why she found it hard to get on with her mother: "She talks as they do in old novels. . . . She even has a vocabulary like that. Yesterday she talked about literature. I, of course, kept absolutely calm, but Mama got heated over it: 'No inspiration.' What can you say in answer to that? I myself haven't a high opinion of many of these books; well, say they can't write, or that the subject is uninteresting, but when you hear words like that you don't feel like saying any more. . . ." Sergei did not understand his sister, perhaps he was not even listening to what she was saying: but Olga was right—she and her mother spoke in different tongues.

"These togs are for Olya," said Sergei.

"Oh, how nice—they'll do for her wedding. . . . Olyechka is getting married. You didn't suspect that, did you? . . . She's marrying her chief. . . ."

Smiling, Nina Georgiyevna led Sergei to his sister. He kissed Olga. What a surprise! . . . Olga getting married! . . . Well, of course, it was only he who thought she was little. . . .

"But, Mama, why didn't you write and tell me?"

"I only heard it myself the other day. Olya didn't say anything. . . ."

Nina Georgiyevna had prepared a holiday dinner, had laid the table and had decorated it with flowers. They drank muscatel and smiled at each other as they sipped the wine. Sergei thought to himself: "Good, things are beginning to get into shape! . . . If only there's no war. . . ."

He told them a lot about Paris. His mother hung on every single word; she recognized the city of her youth, and yet it was a different Paris, beautiful but in a lurid glare, as if seen through a red glass, everything seemed to be on fire: the streets, the houses, the people. . . . Do the people there think there's going to be war? . . . How horrible! Why, people here are only just beginning to have an easier time. . . . Perhaps Sergei was too hasty in his conclusion? . . .

"Seryozhenka, do the French intend to fight?"

"They say so, but they certainly don't want to. . . ."

"Who does want to fight? . . ."

"Well, you see, Mama, nobody wants to fight, but we don't want to

fight and will, they don't want to fight, and won't. If they do, it will only be half-heartedly, for the sake of appearances. . . ."

"I've no confidence in France," said Olga. "Everything they have belongs to the past, only their fashions, perhaps, are in the present. . . . I was listening to you and thinking—how backward they are! It would be very interesting, of course, to see it all, but if I were told—go where you like, I would go to Germany, or America. There, at any rate, industry is up-to-date, and they have modern conveniences. . . . As for the French—they are finished."

"What are you saying, Olya?" exclaimed Nina Georgiyevna in a horrified tone. "How can such a nation be finished? You know, I read Hugo to my pupils yesterday. If only you could have seen how they felt every word!"

Olga laughed:

"But when did your Hugo live? Everything they have belongs to the past."

"Why only to the past? Romain Rolland is writing today. You are wrong not to want to read him. He has a noble heart."

"He's an old man too. Everything they have belongs to the past. And besides, it isn't only a matter of authors, their industry is out-of-date, their state is falling to pieces, and Seryozha says they won't defend themselves. What is there to go into raptures about? Reminiscences?"

"Seryozhenka, do explain to her. . . . You have seen. . . ."

When Nina Georgiyevna was agitated she smoked a lot. Now she was lighting cigarette after cigarette.

"Of course I have seen. They are a wonderful people. . . . I was at a factory one day, a workman came up to me, he was almost a boy. 'Are you a Russian?' he asked me. I told him I was. Then he said: 'Then tell Comrade Stalin that he has lots of friends here, tell him not to believe the newspapers.' Now a young fellow like that will go out and meet death. . . . They are a talented people, very quick at grasping things, they are all inventors. . . . And gay, I think they could make a dead man laugh. Only I feel very anxious about them, Mama. France is like a girl who has been forced to marry a man she does not love—she cannot leave him and cannot live with him, but she does, and lives in a way that makes the Germans jump for joy. And she seems to be so defenceless. . . ."

He checked himself: His voice was too agitated as he uttered the last words—the shade of Mado rose before him. He turned to his sister:

"But you, Olyechka, are not marrying against your will, you are marrying the man of your choice. . . . Let's drink to your happiness! It seems so funny. Is it so long ago that I bought you a doll? . . ."

"How good it is that you are back, Seryozha dear! As if you had felt. . . . And we'll celebrate the wedding in the new apartment. You must hurry up and be introduced to Semyon Ivanovich, you'll like him.

And now I want you to back me. I mean with Mama. . . . The doctor says she has high blood pressure and must take care of herself. In the first place, she smokes too much. . . .”

Nina Georgiyevna smiled guiltily and put her cigarette out.

“That’s only today, I feel so excited. . . . I make them myself now, Seryozha, it takes less tobacco.”

“But smoking is only half the trouble,” continued Olga. “The main thing is her work. She must give up the school, the Institute is quite enough. The pay is wretched, and look at the distance she has to travel. . . .”

“Olya. . . . How can you approach the subject from the point of view of pay? I have such wonderful pupils there! It is a real joy! I can see them developing, beginning to understand. You can’t imagine, Seryozhenka, what a generation is growing up! Better than yours. . . . True, they’re having an easier time. But somehow, they seem to be more alive, their souls are wide open. . . . I remember that, before, some used to laugh and say: ‘Old junk.’ But these drink in every word. They’ll grow up to be real men and women. That is why it is so awful to hear you speak about war. . . . As for the school, I’ll never give that up.”

“You’d do better to tell Seryozha how much you get. And on top of that, there’s that hour and a half ride in that awful tramcar. . . . The doctor said you must take care of yourself.”

Sergei realized that this conversation was causing his mother pain; he enquired about Vasya.

Olga went off to her office. Nina Georgiyevna wanted to justify her daughter in Sergei’s eyes:

“Don’t think she’s greedy for money. She offered to make me an allowance. She’s had a rise. . . . She only talks like that. . . . She’s a kindhearted girl. It’s touching to see the way she looks after me. . . .”

“Do you approve of her choice, Mama?”

“Do you mean Semyon Ivanovich? . . . I confess I don’t know him very well. Olya is happy—and that’s the main thing. . . . Tell me some more about Paris.”

Sergei spoke to her for a long time—about the embankments of the Seine and about the fascists, about Sembat’s pictures, about the factories, about the workers, and about the trees. He told her also about the night he was on the heights of Montmartre when Paris surged below, like a vast sea. Only he did not say that he had not been there alone. Nina Georgiyevna sensed that he was concealing something. . . .

“Didn’t you fall in love there, Seryozha?”

“Fall in love? . . . With Paris.”

When he went away Nina Georgiyevna thought to herself: Well, now Seryozha has withdrawn into himself. . . . Vasya will never say a word. . . . And Olya. . . .

When Sergei had asked: "Do you approve of her choice?" Nina Georgiyevna mustered all her strength not to tell the truth.

It had happened two days before. Olga came home, seemingly quite calm. And it was only when she sat down to dinner that Nina Georgiyevna noticed that Olya was not her usual self, she pushed her plate away and sat silently moving her lips.

"What's the matter with you, Olya?"

"Nothing particular."

But several minutes later Olga said:

"Semyon Ivanovich and I have decided to go to the registry office. . . . So in October I shall move over to him. I am worrying how you will get on alone, Mama. . . . But I'll come and see you often. . . ."

Nina Georgiyevna turned away; she could not conceal her emotions.

"Are you against it, Mama? . . ."

"Why didn't you tell me about it before?"

"I didn't know myself. . . ."

"Olyechka. . . do you love him?"

"It's hard enough for me to talk as it is, Mama, and you come along and talk like a questionnaire. . . . In my opinion, Labazov is a decent fellow. I have no exceptional feeling for him, but that's not essential. Everybody has a high opinion of him. I can see that myself—I've been working there a year, haven't I? . . . Actually, we have been meeting for a long time, as if we had been registered. But the day before yesterday it became definite that he was to get an apartment in a new house on the Mozhaiskaya, and he proposed that we go through the formalities. . . ."

Nina Georgiyevna asked no more questions, she restrained herself so as not to upset Olga, she congratulated her.

She burst into tears only after Seryozha had left. She pictured Semyon Ivanovich to herself, his sagging, sallow cheeks and his small sleepy eyes, and she felt inexpressibly sorry for Olya. Then she began to reason with herself: Olya is not a little girl, she knows Labazov. One cannot judge by appearances. . . . He is one of the complacent sort—but that's all for the good, Olya is like that too. . . . Perhaps she loves him, only she would not say so—she is so proud. But how awful it was to hear her say: "Go through the formalities"! . . . Or does it only seem so to me because I have grown old and no longer understand anything? . . .

Now Nina Georgiyevna wept over herself, over her dreams. And so loneliness had come. . . . The night threatened to crush her heart. Nina Georgiyevna then forced herself to sit down to the table and take out her exercise books. Hugo salutes freedom. . . . And she smiled, her face wet with tears—no, her autumn was not empty, not cold!

On parting with Sergei, Mado had said that love would be her anchor, but it turned out otherwise—love turned out to be a millstone round her neck. Mado could neither return to her former life nor dream of meeting Sergei again. She sat in her room for whole days, indifferent to everything.

"Why don't you go on with your painting?" Sembat asked her. "Perhaps I, too, am suffering, but I go on with my work."

"I am not suffering. I don't exist."

Sembat growled:

"But he'll come back soon...."

She shook her head:

"I am not thinking of him."

That was true. The blow had been so heavy that she could think of nothing. Sometimes she looked around in wonder at the things that were familiar to her—the scent bottles, the small carpet, the easel with the long abandoned *étude* on it. Sergei had drawn her out of her previous life. But she had found no new life.

Marceline asked herself anxiously: What's the matter with Mado? Only recently she had been in such high spirits, had laughed and had gone out. But now she didn't utter a word, kept staring at one spot.... She would not open her heart to her mother, she was secretive.... Marceline tried to talk to her husband about her, but he answered:

"Don't judge by yourself.... She belongs to another generation, they don't take things to heart so much now. But Mado does look bad, we must call Morillot to have a look at her. It's a pity we can't go to Gelinotte, she would soon pull round there.... But what can we do, everybody's talking about war...."

Dr. Morillot had long been the Lanciers' family physician, he knew by heart what Marceline's blood pressure was and what was "playing pranks" with Maurice. He was an affable cynic; there was tobacco ash on his clothes; his tiny pince-nez bobbed comically on his enormous fleshy face. Morillot said:

"Mon cher, if doctors treated illnesses like these, what would Nivelles have to write about? She's very impressionable.... People like you always have children with some kink. You have fluttered through life and you are fluttering now, don't argue! Snuff boxes, suppers, and so on and so forth.... But this sort of thing disgusts them. Thank your lucky stars that Louis is taken up with aviation, that he doesn't smoke opium or shoot his mistresses."

"But aviation today is the most dangerous thing imaginable.... Of course, I don't, myself, believe there's going to be war."

"In my opinion, though, things are in a bad way. In Moscow they're at a deadlock.... I'm afraid it may end in disaster...."

It was in the dining room while they were drinking their morning coffee. Lancier opened his newspaper and suddenly, with an agitation that was unusual for him, he exclaimed:

"The Russians have betrayed us!"

This frightened Marceline, never before had she seen her husband put out by what was in the newspapers; if he did share the news with the members of his family, it was theatrical gossip, or an amusing story about a prolific Canadian woman who had given birth to quintuplets. But now Lancier was extraordinarily agitated. Marceline knew very well what that thin voice rising to a squeal meant.

Mado stepped up to her father:

"What did you say?"

"What I said. They have made a deal with the Germans."

"That's impossible. . . ."

"Well, read for yourself. . . . A Havas report from Moscow."

Mado silently retired to her room. She could still hear her father squealing and Louis saying in a tone of indignation: "I didn't expect anything like that from them. At any rate, it's not sportsmanlike." . . . It seemed to Mado that they were talking about Sergei. It's not true, it's impossible! He had rejected love for the sake of his ideas, had talked with Mado and had suddenly rushed for a newspaper. . . . And how many times had he said that there would be war, and that the Germans must be beaten. . . . Had it all been a dream? Had Sergei betrayed his own dream? Or perhaps Sergei was now in torment, not knowing how to live? Perhaps the dream had betrayed Sergei? . . . She must talk to somebody, she must understand. What Mado, repeating what her father said, called "politics" had burst into her life, had merged with her personal grief.

She went to see Sembat. He was in a state of excitement:

"The devil take them all! Now there will certainly be war. And it won't be easy to cope with those Germans. If we fought for four years in the nineteen fourteen war we shall have to fight eight years now. . . ."

"But, Sembat, what have the Russians done?"

"Why, they have reached an agreement with the Germans. . . ."

"But that's impossible!"

"There's nothing surprising about it. We wanted to outwit them, but they have outwitted us. That's all there is to it. . . ."

Mado said to herself: Sembat doesn't understand either. All he knows is his painting. They all read the newspapers and believe what they read. . . . Yes, but that report came from Moscow. . . . Who could explain this thing to her? Suddenly she remembered: Lejean. Why hadn't she thought of him before? Sergei had said to her on several occasions: "Lejean understands us. . . . He is a true friend." . . . If he understands Sergei he can explain everything to her. . . .

Rarely did outward appearance belie a man's spiritual qualities more than it did in the case of Henri Lejean: neither his kind, somewhat bewildered-looking eyes, nor his mild gestures betrayed that man's iron will. No wonder Lancier was proud of him: Lejean was one of the most talented engineers in Paris; if he stuck at the little Roche aîné plant, it was only because his very name roused the big factory owners to fury; few men were talked of with such hatred. The Rights were enraged by his ability to keep his composure in any situation, by his restraint and erudition. Nivelles once said: "A bum reading *l'Humanité* I can understand, but a Communist reading Dante—is something unnatural and revolting! . . ." The son of a lawyer who had been one of the first Socialists in Lille, and the grandson of a physician who, in his youth, had almost paid with his life for concealing wounded Communards, Henri Lejean was a hereditary intellectual; he accepted Communism after long reflection, but having once made up his mind, he plunged into everyday political activity. The workers said: "Our Henri means what he says." . . . They loved him for his sternness, devotion and sterling honesty. Nor was his appearance as deceptive as one might think: pitiless towards the enemy, he was responsive and attentive towards his comrades. A certain Right newspaper called Lejean a hypocrite and asserted that he was fond of luxury, elegant mistresses, and high price brothels. But Lejean lived with his wife and two children, the elder of whom had just turned sixteen, in a small apartment, the only item of luxury in which was a piano—Lejean's wife, Josette, was fond of music.

Mado visited Lejean now and again. After Corbeille, these plain chairs with the cane seats, the old sideboard, the modest dinners, at which the family discussed simple, intelligible things, seemed bliss to her. In her eyes, Lejean was not a formidable tribune, not a brilliant engineer, but a kindhearted and quiet-tempered man who played hide-and-seek with seven-year-old Mimi and helped Paul to solve his mathematical problems. Often she envied Josette's lot.

But Josette lived not in a toy paradise, but on hard black earth. The daughter of a working man, she had "got on in the world"—had become a schoolteacher in a mining village, where soot covered everything—the faces, the houses, the trees. Of a gay temperament, she had known sorrow, hunger and pain. There was something childlike in her face, but the wrinkles round her eyes, and the eyes themselves, tired and sometimes melancholy, spoke of her experience of life. Lejean had met this laughter-loving and yet pensive girl eighteen years ago; he gave her faith—before that she had thought that life was but a fierce struggle for bread, for money, for position; with Henri the struggle became life for her. For several years Lejean was unable to obtain employment and they lived on Josette's modest salary; but she did not lose heart—she knew what she was living for.

How could she understand that madcap Mado? And Mado was a little afraid of her. One day she said to Lejean: "Your wife is a very stern woman." He laughed: "Nothing of the kind. . . . You are accustomed to hothouse plants, and that is why you think she's stern, but Josette grew up out in the cold."

Like everybody else, Lejean was shocked by the brief report from Moscow. Mado's arrival perplexed and irritated him—he could not be bothered with visitors! . . . But he at once felt that Mado was weighed down by some sorrow, and he was particularly kind to her.

"You alone can explain it to me. . . . I don't trust anybody else, they all hate the Russians. . . . But I know that you—are with them. I cannot understand. . . . Tell me, is it true that they have betrayed us?"

"Betrayed us? . . ." Lejean laughed, and his sad face became sadder still. "How could they betray us? Why, we deserted them long ago. I don't mean us, but those who are ruling France. Munich, and then the pact with Ribbentrop. . . . They wanted the Germans to hurl themselves upon Russia."

"But what about the mission to Moscow? . . ."

"That was only eyewash. . . . They thought they would be able to fool the Russians. Here, read the interview with Voroshilov. Do you see, 'aggressor'—he means the fascists. The Poles refused the Red Army right of transit and the French and English supported Beck. The Russians had no alternative. . . ."

"But I heard so many times from him. . . ." Mado checked herself. "I have heard so many times that the principal enemy—are the fascists. How could they reach agreement? And against us. . . . Here there is not only Bonnet, not only Nivelles, but you, Sembat, the workers, the people. . . ."

Dusk set in. Lejean wanted to put the light on but refrained. Josette went out with her daughter. Lejean said:

"We have to pay the penalty for other people's sins. Don't think I am talking as an outsider, I am a Frenchman. . . . The prospect is not bright, not by any means. . . . But our Russian comrades have done right—they are mustering their forces. If Moscow holds out it will mean that France too will live. But we cannot escape the ordeal, and it will be a hard, a very hard one. . . . But don't despair. When you are told that the Russians have betrayed us, know that they are traitors who are speaking. Now we shall be baited, flung into prison, murdered. The test is coming—a test not by word, but by steel. . . ."

Suddenly Paul intervened, he said in a deep bass—his voice was breaking:

"The main thing now is—loyalty. . . ."

Lejean smiled:

"Do you see, if we are killed, these will finish the fight. . . ."

Mado went away in great perturbation. A gamble, a frightful gamble. . . . That boy said "loyalty." But loyalty to what? . . . There is no loyalty, it is a children's fairy tale, children grow up and adults have no time for fairy tales, they are drafted, driven to their graves, and they kick, dodge, hide in the bush. Lejean was no coward though, he would not hide. But there is something I don't understand. . . . Is it possible that that boy Paul sees things better? . . . They are different, they are sturdy. When Lejean talked about "hothouse plants" he meant me, now the glass is broken, the frost has got in, and I am freezing How I would like to change places with Josette! She has Lejean. But Sergei has left me. . . . No, that's not it. . . . True, she has Lejean, but she has something of her own. . . . But I have nothing. I feel no relief when I think of Sergei. But the most frightful thing for me is that—Sergei is no longer with me, he is with Lejean, with Josette, with that funny boy, with everybody, but not with me. . . .

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Events developed with a rapidity that set Lancier's head in a whirl. War, blackout, women weeping at railway stations. Louis went away, and so Marceline was weeping too. And the newspapers were reporting bad news—the Germans were near Warsaw. We rushed into the scrap for the sake of the Poles, but they can't even fight! Where is the Polish Marne? No, they're not Frenchmen! . . . Lancier fumed. He forgot about his snuff boxes, and glancing at his Sudan goat he swore at himself: old fool, what was I thinking about? They might drop a bomb on Corbeille any day. . . . He became unrecognizable to his friends, he was irritable and provoked disputes.

When Lejean came to see him about substitutes for two working men who had been called up for the army, Lancier suddenly squealed:

"So your friends are with Hitler?"

"I think it's our fascists who are with Hitler."

"But what about the Communists? Frenchmen are fighting. . . ."

"I can't see any Frenchmen fighting. It's the Poles who are fighting. . . . Whatever else the French army may be doing, it is not fighting."

"A horse thief is always able to disguise a horse. I ask you, how can you refrain from repudiating the Moscow pact? You—are a Frenchman, devil take it, or perhaps you are a Tatar?"

"I am a Frenchman, not a Frenchman like you. . . . I belong to a different France."

"Are you with Hitler or against him?"

"That's a foolish question! We are against Hitler and against the French fascists."

"Look here, Lejean, you might fool small boys with talk like that. But I am fifty-four years old. . . . I can understand that the Russians have acted shrewdly. They are real egoists. But how can you, a Frenchman, justify them? Aha, now you are silent, you don't know what to say! I am asking you as a friend, we may be on different sides of the barricades, but the barricades are French, not Siberian!"

"Very well, I'll answer you, only I doubt whether you'll like my answer. But every French workingman will agree with me. For us the Soviet Union is not a utopia. The Russians may have their defects, after all, they are only human, but they have achieved what my grandfather dreamed of, and what the Federals fought for. If Moscow triumphs we shall have a motherland, a real France. But if Moscow perishes, we shall perish. Hitler will come—German or French makes no difference. You say that the Russians are egoists, my answer is that the fate of France is linked with theirs."

"Then go to your Tatars, Monsieur!" Lancier was beside himself with rage. "We shall never forgive this! We shall not halt in Berlin, we shall go on to Moscow! . . ."

"It's hard to get angry with you, Monsieur Lancier, you don't understand anything and don't want to understand. you repeat the nonsense published in *Paris Soir*."

In the corridor Milet stopped Lejean:

"I want to talk to you, Henri. There's something the boys don't understand, the Party's tactics. Would you believe it, they're talking bunk about Thaelmann now being with Hitler. I told them they are fools for believing that, but that's not enough, you understand that, don't you? . . ."

Milet was twenty-two, but he didn't look more than seventeen—a scraggy youth; he was always bubbling over with enthusiasm, no matter what he did—stick leaflets on walls, collect money for the Spaniards, or try to convince old Jacques that Blum and we were on different roads.

"Fascists—are fascists, tell them that," answered Lejean. "They will never release Thaelmann, not for anything. If the French fight Hitler in earnest, the Russians will assist. Who helped the Spaniards? . . . The government has suppressed *l'Humanité*, but *Je suis partout* continues to come out undisturbed—on German money. . . . That shows that they are not even thinking of fighting Hitler. They will fight, but against us."

Milet vigorously shook Lejean's hand.

"That's the stuff! You've taken a burden off my shoulders. . . . I have an old mother, and even she was giving me no peace: 'How is it you are with the Boches? . . .' Of course, I myself quite understand that the Party cannot be with Hitler, and that's what I tell them. . . . And they won't break our spirit, Henri. . . . Do you know what, I'd like

to be in the Kremlin just for a minute, to hear what Stalin is saying now. Do you understand me? . . .”

Early in the evening Nivelles came to see Lancier.

“Forgive me for coming without warning. . . . I deemed it to be my duty. I have learned at the Prefecture that Lejean is on the list of those to be taken into custody. I shall not stop to argue about the rights or wrongs of the matter, but I know how important he is for Roche aîné, and I didn’t want you to be taken unawares. . . .”

Marceline exclaimed indignantly:

“God, what does this mean! They’re supposed to be fighting the Germans, but they put our own people into prison! I will never believe that Lejean is a spy. He may have his own ideas, but he is the most honest of men.”

Nivelles answered:

“I don’t think anybody doubts that Monsieur Lejean is personally a respectable man. That’s not the point. The point is—are his ideas compatible with the security of France? But then, it is not I who settle questions like that, and it is not for me to defend Daladier’s policy. I only wanted, as a friend, to warn you. . . .”

Nivelles left the house. He lit up the street with a flashlight and saw Mado. Without saying “good night” to him she vanished round the corner. She was in a hurry: every moment was precious! She had no right now to think about herself, or about her aimless life. For one hour her existence was justified. . . .

Josette opened the door for her. Mado realized at once: she was too late—the floor was littered with books, clothing and pillows.

“I thought I’d be able to warn you in time. . . .”

Josette impulsively threw her arms around her and kissed her. This caress was so unusual that tears appeared in Mado’s eyes.

“They took him away at six o’clock. I’ve had no time to clear up.”

Paul pressed Mado’s hand:

“Thank you, comrade.”

When Mado returned home her father was still fuming:

“I am not speaking about the blow this is to Roche aîné, the whole place rested on Lejean’s shoulders. . . . But he really is the most honest of men, I argued with him yesterday and got heated. . . . Everybody has gone absolutely mad. Why do they want to get the workers’ backs up? There’s no unity among us. But the Germans, they follow Hitler. . . . We are richer and more powerful, of course, but still it’s terrible. Terrible for France. And I’m sorry for Lejean. . . .”

To her father’s surprise Mado objected:

“People like that are not to be pitied, they are to be envied. . . . They believe, and are believed. But what about us? Everything frightens us, and we have no faith in anything. . . .”

She remembered how Paul had called her "comrade" and she blushed.

Nivelle was walking down the long corridor of the Prefecture and suddenly he collided with Lejean, who was in the custody of policemen. Lejean ironically greeted him:

"You don't seem to recognize me, Monsieur Nivelle?"

"I'm sorry. . . . It's dark here. . . ." And suddenly getting angry he added: "Do you see what your Russians have done?"

"The Russians will yet save France."

From the day the war started Nivelle began to keep a diary; he wanted to preserve a record of the experiences of these ominous times, if not for himself, then at least for others. After his encounter with Lejean he made the following entry:

"All quiet at the front. The war at home is continuing. Lejean has been arrested. I met him, the meeting was very unpleasant. I understand, of course, that the Communists have put themselves outside the nation. But it's depressing, and provides no way out. I don't know who stands to gain by this war, certainly not we, and I think—not the Germans. But it is too late to choose, Hitler has chosen, he is ready to go to any lengths, he has even concluded a pact with the Bolsheviks. I am amazed at his blindness. He is a gambler, ready to stake everything at the gaming table—kith and kin, country and honour, only to commit suicide if he loses. A pack of cards, a pale, flickering candle stump at dawn, and ruins—such will be the end of Europe. I recall a conversation I had with Schirke, he talked about the organic unity of Western civilization. Perhaps Schirke is now in the German army and on our frontier. . . . We are fighting precisely for the triumph of Western civilization, for their Weimar against the Nazi-Communist empire. I shall put in an application for enrolment tomorrow, I want to be sent off to the front. Things are easier in a dugout than in an office these days. So depressing. Europe is blacked out, like this city. And the mind is blacked out. Abducted Persephone is weeping in a bomb shelter, and I lack the gift to translate her tears into the language of men." . . .

He wanted to lie down but changed his mind and paced up and down his room. Words fluttered and whirled before his eyes, he wanted to clutch at them, but they eluded his grasp. One line hung suspended like a broken twig. Then the world, dark and empty, resounded; Nivelle's mind was filled with words, sounds, twitterings and vibrations. He wrote until the morning, and it seemed to him that he had never written with such inspiration.

Day at last. . . . He shaved, prepared to go out, wanted to read what he had written, but something restrained him; in the end he did read. What poor stuff, how far-fetched! No resonance, no heart. . . . It was probably impossible to write poetry now. He crumpled the

thin sheets and suddenly remembered Lejean's ironic greeting in the gloomy corridor at the Prefecture. A fit of anger contorted his face. Yes, now we must fight, and we shall vanquish you, Monsieur Lejean!

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The meeting was a stormy one. Sergei's project was opposed by Belchev, who asserted, firstly, that "Comrade Vlachov is not a realist and exaggerates the possibilities of standardized construction of sections," secondly, that he "is floundering in the swamp of old formulas and is pushing local resources into the background," and lastly, that "Comrade Grigoryev is absolutely right." Belchev spoke heatedly and believed what he said, although only yesterday he had agreed with Sergei. It was Grigoryev's speech that had caused him to change his mind. He was always like that: it was enough for somebody in a higher position to utter a word for Belchev, quite honestly, to forget what he had said a day or even an hour before. He could not understand Sergei: if Grigoryev says a thing it must be so. . . . But Sergei was obstinate. It was decided to examine his project again. In his heart Sergei swore at Belchev, but on the whole he was satisfied with the results of the meeting.

A bright October sunset. In the boulevard, children were playing. Couples were strolling. A woman wearing a gaily coloured kerchief was saying to a Red Army man: "I managed to buy such lovely wine glasses! Oh, so t-h-i-n. . . ." The air was fresh and crisp, the sky was lightly tinged. Sergei thought to himself: What a joy that we are not at war! . . . He tried to picture Paris blacked out, but could not—the lights of gaiety rose up in his memory.

And Mado? . . . What has happened to her? Heartsick, he sank heavily onto a vacant bench and closed his eyes. Mado came towards him in a green frock, smiling. . . . He would never see her again! Not even receive a letter from her. . . . War lay between them. Paris has vanished, shut out, as if by a fog, by news reports, declarations, communiqués. Where was Mado now? . . . It is true—you can't play hide-and-seek with fate. . . .

Sometimes it seemed to Sergei that he was beginning to forget Mado, and then he would feel not relief, but horror, as if he was losing himself; then his sadness returned and he felt calmer. He was wrong in accusing himself of being frivolous: he could feel glad, even gay, but in the depth of his heart lived Mado.

He had plunged headlong into the whirlpool of Moscow life; every tiny detail thrilled him. Sitting on the bench in the boulevard, he continued mentally to argue with Belchev. Why is it impossible

to organize standardized production? . . . Grigoryev is a good worker, but he may be mistaken. And Belchev simply repeats what he says like a parrot. . . . There was a wretched little hovel here last year and look what they have built. Moscow has grown more beautiful. In the West, they don't believe that we have learned how to build. They don't believe anything. They wanted the blow to fall on us. How will they screen themselves from the Germans? With Chamberlain's umbrella? It's not Hitler they want to overthrow—but us. It was enough to listen to Nivelle. . . . If only we could gain a few years. . . . Grigoryev judges by hard and fast rules. Clings to out-of-date methods. . . . Of course, the Germans are a formidable force, but it's easier now—we've pushed our frontiers out. . . .

He remembered the fields of Poland. Ashes and blood there now. . . . What will happen to Paris? The bench under the chestnut tree. . . . No, Mado cannot be separated from Paris! . . . Could he sit on this bench with her? Never! . . .

Two strapping girls with sunburned faces were now sitting on the bench beside him; one was laughing and saying: "As soon as he saw that, he sang a different tune. . . ." Sergei smiled. The girls went away. The one who was laughing was like Olya. . . . Olga was a good girl, only she was still small, her very practicalness was childish. Mama must take medical treatment, she is looking very unwell. . . . I wonder what kind of journey Vasya had? . . .

Sergei looked at his watch, hurriedly got up and jumped on a tramcar, like an urchin.

The Labazovs were giving a wedding party and housewarming combined. Olga had insisted that they should wait until Vasya returned—he had been on a business trip. In addition to her relatives, she had invited her school friend Natasha Krylova. Labazov had invited two members of his editorial staff: the sub-editor Petya Drozdov and the foreign affairs expert, sixty-year-old Zamkov.

First of all the host showed the guests round the apartment. It was only a small one—two rooms, but Semyon Ivanovich pointed to every tiny detail in it. Near the toilet he said in a half-whisper: "This is the—you know what."

Labazov was thirty-two; fat, with an unhealthy complexion, he looked older, and always looked as if he had just got up from sleep; his small eyes lit up only when he thought he had outwitted somebody. He had been appointed editor two years ago, before that he had worked in a trade union office. He did not like newspaper work, but was unstinting in his zeal, and at night read the proofs ten times over, always finding something that was, as he put it, "doubtful." It was enough for him to see a fresh simile or an unhackneyed epithet for him convulsively to clutch his red pencil. He would say to the members

of his staff: "The trick is—to avoid mistakes," and to Olga he confessed: "Everything might look all right, and suddenly.... It's easier to catch a flea in a field!" He was content with his position and chaffed Petya Drozdov, who was always trying to push himself forward: "You'll get your reward—in the neck!"

The small apartment, cluttered up with furniture, looked like a second-hand store. Semyon Ivanovich proudly showed his guests the radiola, the mahogany bedstead, the couch with about a dozen silk cushions, and the bronze clock fashioned like the globe.

Sergei said to his sister:

"How many vases you've got! I feel like a bull in a china shop...."

Olga laughed:

"It won't matter if you break something. Only don't break the drinking glasses, I haven't got many...."

"I never had anything before," said Semyon Ivanovich, "but you know the times we're in—everybody is buying things—we are settling down...."

Vasya, who usually spoke little, suddenly butted in, and as Nina Georgiyevna thought, rather tactlessly:

"I can't tolerate a lot of junk. You feel much freer without it."

The supper was gorgeous: meat pies, crab, salad, salmon of that virginal tint that is most suitable for a wedding party, a sucking pig decorated with a paper rose; then came a wedding cake, so pink that even the salmon and the rose on the piglet paled before it; vodka, tintured and plain, four kinds of wine, and champagne. Semyon Ivanovich ate a great deal and hurriedly, but seemingly without relish, as if he were performing a duty. But Olga ate slowly, enjoying every bit, so that looking at her, Petya, who had eaten his fill and was also half drunk, was infected by her example and, after the cake, took another helping of the sucking pig. Zamkov ate with indifference, as if he were dining at the office dining room. Vasya, who had had a few drinks, became exhilarated and told Natasha, who was sitting next to him, that he had been at the circus and had seen the hypnotizer who claimed that he could see through and through people; somebody stole the hypnotizer's watch and he yelled: "Where's the militia?" and somebody in the audience answered: "If you can see through people, what do you want the militia for?" Natasha laughed so infectiously that everybody else laughed, even Zamkov, although nobody had heard the story about the hypnotizer.

They all begged Sergei to tell them about Paris; they listened to him attentively, but dispassionately, as if he were telling them about the habits and customs of the Middle Ages, or about constellations of stars. Only Nina Georgiyevna was moved: she wanted to understand

what had happened to Sergei in Paris. Zamkov drew out a notebook and enquired:

"Whom is big finance capital backing now?"

And Natasha was amused by the fact that stoves were put out on the café terraces in winter; laughingly she repeated: "They heat the streets, now aren't they funny!"

Vasya enquired whether there had been much building in Paris before the war; he was an architect, and raved about the cities of the future—white, green and quiet. Then he said:

"You wouldn't recognize Minsk, it's a big European city...."

Everybody was interested. And Sergei felt that Minsk, where he had never been, interested him more than Paris. One was a dream, even though a beautiful one, the other—was life, like stocky Vasya's bass voice, like Natasha's laughter, like Zamkov's rasping voice. Why, upon the houses of Minsk, upon his project—say what you like, Grigoryev is wrong!—upon thousands of other details depended the fate of every individual sitting round that table.

Vasya mentioned schools, and the conversation turned from architecture to education.

"They've allowed the kids to get out of hand," said Labazov. "My father walloped me when I was young and it didn't do me any harm."

Nina Georgiyevna said indignantly:

"If you argue like that we can go back to the times when *The Good Husbandman* was written! Pedagogues must be sensitive, they are lacking in culture, and a child—is a young tree, it can easily be broken...."

Semyon Ivanovich switched on the radio:

"Let's hear what's doing in the world...."

The announcer reported a meeting in Baranovichy and then talked about a pumpkin of extraordinary weight; he talked with such fervour that one might have thought that he had grown that pumpkin himself and had thereby saved mankind.... "We shall now give the news from abroad..." And the announcer went on to count up how many gross-tons the Germans had sunk that day.

Labazov sniggered:

"After all, they are giving those others a good drubbing, they are fighting well, you can't deny it...."

This made Sergei angry. It was true, the Germans could fight. And nothing was to be expected from Chamberlain and Daladier.... But what was Labazov pleased about?...

"I don't think we need be particularly pleased about the successes the fascists are achieving...."

"Er, er! Your terminology is out-of-date." Semyon Ivanovich always said "er, er" when he grasped his red pencil at his office.

"I'm no diplomat. . . . But black—is black. . . ."

"In the present interval of time, perhaps. . . ." rasped Zamkov. "Recently I heard a lecture at a meeting of food workers and the lecturer presented the problem in a new light. . . ."

"Even lecturers can be mistaken. I have been in Germany only in transit. But in Paris I met a German woman Communist. . . ."

And Sergei told them about Anna's grief.

"The scoundrels!" exclaimed Natasha.

Nina Georgiyevna's eyes filled with tears. Vasya said:

"We shall have to fight them sooner or later. Better later--we'll muster our forces. . . ."

Petya Drozdov was bursting to put a word in; everybody thought that he was about to pour oil on the flames, but he said:

"Do you know what the people are calling the Germans now? Our mortal friends."

This amused everybody. Semyon Ivanovich wound up the gramophone. Petya danced with Olga, Vasya danced with Natasha.

"Are the French women good-looking?" Labazov asked Sergei.

Sergei smiled:

"There are all kinds. And besides, it's a matter of taste. . . ."

Petya smiled dreamily:

"Judging by the movies, they are exceptionally good-looking. . . . Only I suppose they can be bought. . . ."

Sergei shrugged his shoulders. Nina Georgiyevna saw him frown, or perhaps she thought he did. Suddenly Semyon Ivanovich laughed very loudly:

"You can find some in this country who can be bought!"

An awkward silence ensued. After all, he is disgusting—thought Sergei. Natasha took up a newspaper and pretended to read. Olga went into the kitchen and came back with the teapot.

"It will draw soon and we'll have tea."

Zamkov took some jam, licked the spoon and said:

"You've fixed yourself up very nicely, Semyon Ivanovich. And you've found a nice wife. That's a great happiness. Perhaps you yourself do not realize what happiness it is."

Two years ago Zamkov lost his wife with whom he had lived for over thirty years; he looked sad and neglected; when at work, or when he discussed politics, he felt cheerful enough; but now, looking at Olga's hands as she was pouring out the tea, he suddenly aged and again mumbled like an old man:

"A great happiness. . . ."

Labazov answered:

"Yes, just the kind of wife to have. . . . A pity we've already had our vacation. . . . Next summer we'll go to Sochi—Olga insists on going to Sochi. Isn't that so, Olya?"

Olga did not answer. Labazov continued:

"I must say I prefer something different—a nice quiet spot with a hook and line. . . . Mine is nightwork, and there's the responsibility—it's easy to let something slip through, this puts a strain on the nerves. . . . But when you throw your line out—it's so restful! . . ."

Sergei smiled: perhaps he was not so bad after all. It's simply his unprepossessing appearance. . . . And he loves Olga. . . .

"I see no pleasure in it," said Petya. "Sit in one place all day long and then boast of having caught a few tiddlers."

Petya was a very restless, even fussy fellow, and always had great plans in his head; he was twenty-six, and had already married twice and divorced twice, he often changed his lodgings, resorting to intricate devices for the purpose, and also changed his occupation—before working on the newspaper he had worked in the People's Commissariat for the Lumber Industry, and before that at a film factory. Every week he frightened Semyon Ivanovich with proposals to "liven up the paper." And Labazov, remembering his last project, said:

"You wouldn't even catch a tiddler! He's so noisy, he'd frighten the fish away. He's like a dynamo, 'pon my word! . . . Do you know what he proposed to me yesterday? To put in headlines as big as this, can you imagine it? Are we the yellow press, or what? If I were to listen to him. . . . And it's all due to ambition. He must push himself forward. . . ."

"Everybody wants to push himself forward," retorted Petya. "And it's not due to ambition at all, it's just exploration. . . ."

"Now, now, none of that! I'm stout, but I don't pretend I'm slim. Our photo correspondents told me that no matter whom they are photographing, Petya is there, thinking he will get in. Last spring he fell ill, lost his appetite and wouldn't eat anything; the doctor said it might be ulcer of the stomach, he lost five kilos. But what do you think? . . . It wasn't an ulcer at all. The trouble was that Gudalov had been awarded a Badge of Honour and Petya fell sick with envy. I barely got him on his feet again."

"It's not true, about Gudalov! I was hurt, of course. . . . I felt sick about it. But Gudalov deserved the badge. . . . As for the headlines, that's another matter. . . . What's it got to do with ambition? I know perfectly well you get no rewards for things like that. More likely to get the sack. . . . But I want, at least once, to do something daring! As Mayakovsky wrote: 'Our God is motion, our hearts are drums.' . . ."

Labazov said that he read poems only because it was part of his duties. Sergei said nothing. Natasha timidly confessed that she preferred Lermontov. Vasva was the only one to back Petya:

"True, I don't know much about poetry, but Mayakovsky—he's grand. . . ."

What else did they talk about as they sat at the round table under the big lamp? About Pogodin's play, the chess tournament, that you can get fine lemons at the Agricultural Exhibition, about apartments, weddings, divorces and again about children—when would they be taught to be polite, and again about the war—what was stronger—the Maginot Line or the Siegfried Line? And profound peace reigned around them, a bowl of fragrant raspberry jam on the table, Olga's calm, bright eyes. Nobody would think that somewhere bombs were shattering dwelling houses, and that the survivors of the sunken "gross-tons" the announcer had mentioned—human beings in boats, on rafts, on planks, were struggling amidst the towering waves.

They all grew tired and fell silent, and then the globe-shaped clock could be heard talking softly about the duration and metre of existence.

The guests departed. Olga silently cleared up. Semyon Ivanovich took his coat off, unbuttoned his shirt collar and at once resembled that country-house Labazov who was so fond of fishing. He was in a good humour—the evening had passed off successfully. And Olga—yes, that was indeed happiness, old Zamkov was right. . . . But suddenly Olga, looking him straight in the face, said:

"If you think I was tempted by your position, you are mistaken. I can go back to Mama tomorrow."

"Why are you making a scene?"

"Because the whole thing disgusts me. Perhaps you think you have bought me?"

Nobody would have recognized Olga at that moment: her bright eyes were now dark, her beautiful but lifeless face became hard. And she said in a whisper:

"If you do, you are mistaken! . . ."

This was not the first time that Semyon Ivanovich had seen Olga in such a state. He knew that he had only to put his arms around her for her to fall silent at once, to become limp and submissive. He stepped up to her confidently and put his hands on her shoulders. She tore herself away:

"Don't touch me! I am going to sleep now. Don't dare wake me!"

She quickly got into bed and drew the blanket over her head. Semyon Ivanovich scratched his flabby cheek disconsolately. She had drunk very little. . . . She was bad-tempered. But she was quiet in company. Better not irritate her—she might indeed leave him. . . . And then Petka would go trumpeting it all over the city. . . .

Olga lay in torment: why did she move into this apartment? Now he thinks he's bought me. . . . If she had picked and choosed she could have found someone better. . . . The most horrible thing about it was that he was right. He had bought her, not for money, of course, but

had bought her all the same. . . . She had had her way now, but what about tomorrow? . . . Now he was her husband, it was not like coming to visit him now and again—she would have to live with him. . . . It was hard, oh, how hard! I do my work better than he does, but still, I am a woman, I wanted comfort, happiness, and that is why I am suffering. . . .

Vasya asked Natasha where she lived.

"In Chisty Street, off Kropotkinskaya."

"I'm going almost the same way. . . . Not quite, but after a night like this it's good to get a breath of air. . . ."

He walked by her side in silence. He had returned from Minsk only the day before, and everything he saw in Moscow pleased him. the familiar streets, the lights, and particularly Natasha who was walking by his side. Several times he said to himself: "She's a nice girl!"

Natasha was crestfallen: Why doesn't he say something? Offered to see me home and yet he doesn't talk. . . . Perhaps he thinks I don't understand anything? Of course, I talked nonsense at the party—drank champagne and danced. . . . Natasha thought to herself bitterly: "Mine is a narrow profession, few people are interested in it." And then she decided: It doesn't matter, let him see that I can do something else besides dance! And without any preliminaries she began to talk about the work of Professor Bubnov: all plants are hungry—they don't get enough moisture, if their nourishment is increased, the whole world will bloom. . . . She talked without stopping almost until they got to her house; she was afraid to look at her companion—perhaps he was laughing at her. . . . She stopped talking as suddenly as she had commenced. Vasya said:

"Very interesting! And you tell it so nicely."

He wanted to say more, but could not think of what to say: on bidding her good night he tightly squeezed her hand; and Natasha realized that he did not despise her. While she was undressing she even thought to herself: I think he took a liking to me. . . . But at once she scolded herself: None of that! get into bed at once! . . .

Vasya tramped back to his lodgings at the other side of the town and kept repeating to himself with a smile: a nice girl! A bit mixed up about plants—but a very nice girl!

Sergei saw Nina Georgiyevna home. She said:

"Olyechka is happy. Perhaps it is better that way—no tumultuous feelings. I find it difficult to understand. . . . But Olya is a quiet girl, and her love is steady. Isn't that so, Seryozha? . . ."

He hadn't been listening very attentively and his answer was beside the point:

"What I like about him is that he is fond of fishing. . . ."

After seeing his mother home Sergei roamed through the city. The autumn stars glittered over his head, but he paid no attention to them.

He did not think of either the nights of Paris, nor Mado. The events of the day had vanished: his project, his argument with Grigoryev, the party at Olga's. Sometimes a man thinks about something important, but his thoughts are so nebulous, so majestic that he is not conscious of what he is thinking, and words and images sweep past him. So it was that night with Sergei. He sensed the profound peace of Moscow with every fibre of his being—the romping children, snub-nosed Natasha's laughter, Olga's heart, as heavy as lead, his mother's loneliness, the breathing of a thousand homes where people come together and part, old folk toss in their beds, newborn infants wail, a peace as ancient as the earth, as its verdure, as snow. But Sergei already sensed war; it was not the husky voice of the radio he heard, but of people, and night—without light, without love, without happiness, horrible night was approaching.

He reached the river, and suddenly, in the cold green dawn, the Kremlin rose before him—a fortress, beauty, strong will. Then Sergei smiled, waved his hand for some reason, and no longer thinking of anything, mortally tired but soothed, he plodded to his lodgings in the Kudrinskaya.

* 21 *

Somebody had jestingly dubbed Natasha's father, Dmitri Alexeyevich Krylov, "Don Quixote from Lipetsk," although he in no way resembled the knight of the dismal countenance—he had rosy cheeks, was rather rotund, and was invariably cheerful. He was called Don Quixote because of the solicitude he showed for people in trouble. "What are you, a member of the Soviet?" grumbled Varvara Ilyinichna, worried about the health of her husband, who never finished his meals, never had enough sleep, and at fifty years of age was on his feet from morning until night. Dmitri Alexeyevich would answer: "I, my dear, am a Communist, and that too means noblesse oblige."

He was a physician, worked in a hospital, but people came to him with matters that had no relation whatever to the throat and nose—people said: if you're in trouble go to Krylov, he can help you. One day the Party organizer said to him:

"You must look after yourself too, Dmitri Alexeyevich, you are no longer young. Why does she come to you about a room? . . . She ought to go to the proper authorities. . . ."

Dmitri Alexeyevich flared up:

"I'm surprised at you, a member of the Party, talking like that! Authorities are authorities, and a human being—is a human being. How do you expect me to cure that citizeness' adenoids if she has been unjustly deprived of her room? She is now living with her sister, and that sister has tuberculosis, do you understand? I'm obliged to stick

my nose into other things besides other people's noses. It is not enough to discover a method of treating a disease, dear comrade, one must be able to apply it. Methods are established by geniuses, do you hear me—gen-i-us-es! And if a doctor is just a tinker he can dispatch a patient to the next world in spite of all the brilliant discoveries. You can't build Communism without Communists! There is one disease, but it has millions of variations, it's the way you approach a person, but you have read and have not understood anything! If I'm a Communist, then absolutely everything concerns me. Or do you think I ought to stick a sign on my chest with the inscription: 'Engaged exclusively with the nose and throat'? In short, if you don't want to help her, I'll take the matter up myself, and I'll go to the District Soviet this very day, that's what I'll do!..."

Dmitri Alexeyevich was brimful of life. It was enough for Natasha to start talking about grafts, or soils, for him to listen openmouthed as if he were enchanted. His wife was a librarian; after reading a book Krylov would exclaim: "Varya, what do your readers say? I think the heroine is a ninny!..." He could argue for a week about whether the hero was right or wrong; and if he disliked a novel, he would scold the author as if he were sitting in front of him: "Now why do you invent things? After all, a human being is not infusoria, nor a turning lathe—he is far more complicated! Either penetrate right inside or don't write, nobody compels you to, you'd do better to work in a paper mill—they'll print Tolstoy on the paper you make. Just think—there's a shortage of paper, and time is short too—one would need ten lives to read all the good books, and he comes in with such trash!" When Natasha went to the theatre with her father she was both amused and embarrassed—Dmitri Alexeyevich would become as excited as a child, and while the action was in progress he would enquire: "What do you think, does she understand?..." He would be afraid the heroine would discover the villain's perfidy too late, or that the madly jealous lover would not come to his senses in time. When Krylov went anywhere he talked with everybody he met, expressed admiration and indignation. "What wonderful apples!" "Do you call this a school? It's scandalous!" He would chat with the old inhabitants for hours; he could not tear himself away from a machine until he had discovered how it worked. He would eat cheese cakes or dumplings and, licking his lips, he would mumble in rapture: "What a country we have, eh?..."

That is why Valya Steshenko went to see Dr. Krylov; there was nothing the matter with her nose or throat, and she still dreamed of becoming a movie star, although nobody at the Institute had discovered that she possessed any particular talent. On setting eyes on Dmitri Alexeyevich Valya was amazed: she had pictured Krylov as a little, quiet man wearing eyeglasses, but before her sat a husky fellow furiously blowing through his cigarette holder. The doctor barked:

"What's wrong with you? Speak up, and make it short—I shall be late for the hospital."

"Golubeva advised me to see you, perhaps you remember her—Antonina Vasilyevna..."

"No, I don't remember her. Why do you expect me to remember her? Golubeva, all right, let it be Golubeva. Suppose you come to the point..."

Valya had carefully thought out what she intended to say, but now she was all flustered.

"You treated her for sinus, and you also helped her to get signed on..."

"I don't remember! There are a hundred thousand Golubevas in the world and as many people suffering from sinus, and the number of people who are not signed on runs into a mil-l-i-on, is that clear? Well, what's the trouble? Don't they want to renew it?..."

"No, it's not that, she's not having any trouble, it was she who advised me... Don't think I decided to go to you at once, I wrote to the newspaper first, and I received a reply from the Correspondence Department that they would send my letter on, and they sent it to this same Semipalov..."

"Now tell me, please—do you intend to finish this introduction before evening, or not? Perhaps you'll receive my patients instead of me? Come straight to the point and tell me about this supernatural thing that's happened to you."

"It's not about myself... Hear me out to the end! She's not guilty in the least! Glazkov ordered her to hand out sixty metres from the warehouse, she asked for a receipt, and he shouted at her: 'What, don't you trust the manager!...' She had worked there only two months. She's nineteen, and her mother is an invalid. He got away with it, his son-in-law is a district procurator. But she got three years. Her mother is awfully upset..."

"I simply don't understand what you're talking about!"

"But a life has been ruined, do you understand that?..."

"Shut up! Only answer my questions! What's the name of the citizeness who swiped the cloth?"

"It was the manager, Glazkov, who stole it, she's absolutely innocent."

"Answer my question! What's the name of that, well, the innocent one?..."

"Nadya Karnaukhova."

"Your sister?"

"No, of course not! I'm from Kiev. She's my neighbour, I got a room in their flat. Sometimes I help her mother, she's a total invalid. And Nadya used to borrow books from me to read..."

Valya smiled guiltily, and her plain, inexpressive face at once became so attractive that Dmitri Alexeyevich stopped growling.

"So she's not a relative of yours? . . . But why are you so sure that your Nadya is not mixed up in this lousy business?"

"She came to me at the time in utter despair and told me that she had not taken a receipt for the cloth. I scared her still more, I advised her to report the matter at once. We drew up a statement together. . . . But Semipalov sent it to Glazkov. He decided to do her in, he felt he could do so, because his son-in-law is a district procurator. I have brought you all the documents. . . . Her lawyer assured me several times that she was absolutely innocent, but the case was complicated by the fact that—his son-in-law. . . ."

"Sure, a district procurator is such an important bird! Are we living in the jungle, or what? And you, snivelling like this, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! At your age you ought to be storming fortresses. . . . All right. I'll take the matter up. Now, get out! I've got to change, do you understand? . . ."

Krylov spent two months on the case of that "thrice-accursed Karnaukhova," as he called her. Varvara Ilyinichna grumbled: "I'm convinced she stole it, they all steal. . . . All you want is something to get excited about! Turns a warehouse woman into a Dreyfus! . . ." But her husband would not listen to her. He went to see Labazov, whose acquaintance he had made at Natasha's.

"A crying scandal, Semyon Ivanovich! Your urgent assistance is required—the voice of the press!"

He related to Labazov all the details of the case. Semyon Ivanovich listened in a bored way and then raised his sleepy eyes, looked at Krylov and said:

"You are taking this to heart for nothing, Dmitri Alexeyevich. She got three years, didn't she? She must have got it for something. . . . There's nothing terrible about it, she'll serve her time and—come out reformed. Better drop the matter!"

Krylov went away fuming; he said to Natasha: "Your Olga has married a frozen cod, do you understand me?"

But Dmitri Alexeyevich was not the man to give way. He was convinced that Karnaukhova was innocent and his efforts were crowned with success: the Procurator of the Republic ordered the case to be retried. Shortly afterwards Karnaukhova was released, Glazkov was prosecuted and the Control Commission took up the case of Semipalov. Krylov beamed, and he even remained calm when Varvara Ilyinichna sighed: "That's all very well, but you are not taking care of yourself. . . ."

"But just think, Varya, how hard it is to give birth to a human being, you know that yourself, you carried Natasha nine months, and you shrieked as if you were being slaughtered. And after that? How

many years of your life did you spend on her? First it was teeth, then measles, then fantasies, and then she couldn't choose a profession. But a human being can be ruined in two ticks, by a stroke of the pen. Do you think that because we have a large population we can afford to neglect people? Of course, times are hard. Those White Finns—reconnoitring, trying the strength of our muscles.... I understand—cloth is valuable and you've got to guard it, that's clear. Some people are walking about with their backsides showing.... I would have given that Giazkov ten years, the skunk, digging earth or felling trees. But tell me—is a young woman less valuable than cloth? Isn't she worth guarding?"

Valya came to thank the doctor and brought a flower pot with hothouse lilacs; she could hardly carry it—the plant seemed bigger than herself.

"Nadya will come to see you as soon as she returns to Moscow. Her mother asked me to thank you. And these flowers are from me."

"What next? You'd have done better to have given them to some nice boy, somebody with fantasies.... Oh, but don't they smell wonderfully! Don't go! You'll have dinner with us. Varya! Oh, here she is.... Valya. What's your name? Steshenko? That's all right, there's not many Steshenkos, so I'll remember it. Natasha! I hope you'll like her. She stood up for her neighbour, do you understand? Let them abroad write what they like, but we'll rear them, we'll bring them up...."

* 22 *

Lancier burst out laughing when he saw Léo in military uniform:

"Do you know what you look like? Like an actor in a farce."

"In that case everything's in order—it's a real farce, with quick change artists."

"Yes, it is surprising—we've been at war for five months and yet we don't feel it. It was different in nineteen fourteen...."

Léo smiled:

"There are casualties for all that—a scout in the frontline hanged himself from ennui."

"Ha-ha! That's a good one!... But you in uniform—that's even funnier!... When are you leaving?"

"Tomorrow. For the Belgian frontier. You can imagine how dull it will be!"

"You will have to take up the study of Chinese, or play patience. Louis writes that they don't know what to do to kill time. I have sent him a dozen detective stories."

"I think Léontine is the only one who imagines that this is a real war. I'm worried about leaving her. She is enceinte, you know...."

"Oh, you needn't worry about her, we'll take care of her.... How long can this last? They say that we'll pierce the Siegfried Line in the summer."

"I have heard that it won't be earlier than the spring of nineteen forty-one. Barring surprises, of course...."

"I think there will be surprises. Colonel Finelot told me that if the Finns hold on, operations will commence in the North. They say that Weygand intends to strike at Baku."

"Idiots! Haven't we got our hands full with the Germans? Why pick a quarrel with the Russians?"

"That was your blood speaking...." Lancier patted Léo's knee. "I'm joking. You are more French than I am. As for the Russians, you are right, better not touch them, there're so many of them, and they are fanatics. But you understand, Léo, it's politics everywhere. One would think we were not in the midst of a war, but in an election campaign. I'm fed up with it!"

"I'm doubly fed up with it. Fancy having to wear this silly overall and to salute every Non-Com. I am already dreaming of furlough—in June or July. It'll be a joke if it all ends by the summer! ... After her confinement Léontine will go to Bidart. Go there for the summer, Maurice. It will be pleasanter for Léontine. Perhaps I shall be able to get away. You will see—it's a real paradise. True, Gelinotte is a grander place, but I have the sea. You'll try the local wine. I know you like muscadet. But jurançon puts a glow into you, it is—bottled sunshine. And Mado can do some painting, the mountains there are of a wonderful hue, violet, but not like lilac, and not like violets.... Like wild hyacinth."

"Most surprising," thought Lancier, "things are quieter now than before the war. Before the war we were expecting God knows what, and at the one word 'war' everybody lost their heads. And they were nervous during the first days of the war, people didn't go out without their gasmasks, went off to the mountains. Nivelle insisted that he should be sent off to the front. Makes you laugh to remember it.... It turns out that one can live even in a war. True, Paris is dark at night, but even that has its charm, it must have been like that in the time of Villon. I have to work hard, though. They are still keeping Lejean in prison. Now Léo has been called up. As if there are not enough soldiers without him! Still, it would be a sin to complain—after all, it's war, even if it's a phoney one. What's bad is that Marceline is worried, she thinks that Louis may be killed. She has aged a great deal, formerly she used to go to church only on high holidays, but now she goes quite often. No, when we were at war it was different.... We attacked, we retreated, shells, machine guns, inferno.... But now the Germans entertain our

soldiers with music. You open a newspaper and you can't understand who is the enemy! A few lines about the Germans and all the rest about the Russians. A paradox! . . . Villon once wrote, it's very funny:

*Only our foes will come to our aid,
Only saints have bad reputations.
Nothing in the world is bitterer than honey,
And only lovers talk sound sense.*

"But lovers do not always talk sound sense. I lay a wager that Berty is in love with Mado. It's enough to look at him when he asks how she is. . . . But when I invite him to come here, he refuses. . . . I telephoned him even today, but he excused himself, said he was busy. Poor Mado. . . she has gone pale and thin, but that suits her, she has become even more attractive. She could turn anybody's head, but she lives like a nun. . . ."

Dusk fell. Mado raised her hand to switch on the light but a shudder ran through her body: it seemed to her that Sergei was at her side. For the first time since Sergei's departure she pronounced his name aloud. In her anguish she thought to herself: "There's no one to speak to about him. For some reason Sembat thinks he is in love with me. I can't talk about Sergei to him. . . ."

Never had her parents' house depressed her as it did that winter. Her mother was either praying or weeping. Her father kept on raving that heavy artillery would win the war, and then soothed himself—there's no war, and he repeated culinary recipes like incantations: "Soak in white wine and estragon, lard profusely. . . ." Not a soul around! The newspapers say that the Russians are having a hard time in Finland, the winter is severe, the men are freezing. Perhaps Sergei is there? . . . He is fighting and knows what he is fighting for. Josette also knows. . . .

She felt she could not remain in the room any longer, she dressed and hastily went out, not knowing where to go. Her father called after her:

"Don't be late for dinner, Mado—we are having guests today. I have prepared quenelle and canard à la Rouen. . . ."

The guests long discussed the prospects of the war—they were all strategists, and the matches on the table illustrated the most daring plans. The only one to take no part in the dispute was Professor Dumas. When Lancier asked him what he thought about the prospects of piercing the Siegfried Line he answered:

"You are only wasting matches."

"You strike at the most vulnerable spot," said Nivelle. "Consequently, the most sensible variant is—Finland, and then Leningrad."

Dr. Morillot roared with laughter:

"So that's what you are aiming at! . . . But you know, we stopped at the gates of Saarbrücken, and we turned tail without firing a single shell. This is not war, it's a farce!"

Lancier was offended at Mado's neglect—he had warned her that he had exercised no little fantasy in preparing this dinner, and yet she had not come. . . . Lancier's culinary potential had not been affected by the war; fastidious Nivelles could not praise the pike quenelle highly enough. That Dr. Morillot had to go and spoil a good evening! But he had not done so with evil intent. Sometimes Morillot liked to tease people by telling them the truth to their faces; but he was in a splendid humour today and entertained everybody with all sorts of sensations. His practice carried him among the poor and among people of position, and he was always full of anecdotes, gossip and rumours. When Nivelles mentioned a new type of bomber plane, Morillot said:

"By the way, our rulers have decided to infuse new blood in the government service. They intend to put a new man in charge of the aircraft industry. . . ."

Lancier was busy with the piece of duck on his plate and he enquired without interest, merely out of politeness:

"Whom do they intend to appoint?"

"I don't know him, I don't even remember having heard his name. . . . Somebody named Gaston Roy."

Lancier retained sufficient presence of mind to repress an exclamation of amazement; he merely pushed his plate away and wiped his forehead with his serviette. But something unforeseen happened. . . . Dr. Morillot had been treating Madame Lancier for over twenty years and had often visited Corbeille, but never had he seen Marceline take part in a conversation on politics. But now she exclaimed:

"Why do they keep Louis at the front? If military affairs can be entrusted to a spy, Louis ought to be released. Look how many young lives they are imperiling! . . ."

Embarrassed by the effect of his words, and failing to understand what it was precisely that was agitating Madame Lancier, Morillot growled:

"I'm not surprised—they have no brains."

Marceline retorted:

"They have no consciences. . . ."

She left the room. Silence ensued. Lancier could not explain Marceline's agitation to his friends. He said to himself: "Perhaps I got heated then? If that Roy is being entrusted with such a responsible matter he must be an honest man and a good Frenchman. He did business with the Germans, of course, but there was no war on then. . . ." And Lancier said:

"Marceline has been very nervous lately. What would you have—she is first of all a mother. . . . Of course, there is no fighting just now, but as soon as the front begins to move. . . . Louis is in Fighter Command. . . ."

"It's a silly business, and it's time it was stopped," said Dumas. Seeing that Lancier had not understood him, he explained: "I say that it is time we stopped the war if we have no intention of starting it."

Dr. Morillot had to go up to Madame Lancier: she had an attack. The guests departed. Only Dumas remained—he waited for Morillot.

When he reached home Nivelle made the following entry in his diary:

"The tragic farce is continuing. War, but no war. Everybody is expecting disaster, but they talk about piercing the Siegfried Line. There have been more frightful wars than this, but I don't think there has been a sillier one. A dramatic scene occurred at the Lanciers. When Morillot mentioned the appointment of a fellow named Roy, Madame Lancier exclaimed that he was a spy, and almost swooned. The spy mania is continuing. I don't know Roy, but he probably adheres to a German orientation, everything is mixed up now. Schirke—is a German with a French orientation. Perhaps he, too, has been entrusted with a responsible job. There is only one way to put some spirit into this war, and that is—to turn it against the Bolsheviks. They say that the Duce understands this. But alas, Hitler is a fool, great in his way, but a fool for all that. The end will be universal collapse, and in a thousand years' time they will dig up a statue of Maillol as they once dug up my armless love on Melos. I have stopped writing poetry. In the Prefecture—long lines of arrested people, cold, tobacco smoke, and depression."

* 23 *

Milet came to see Josette, with him came a pale, thin girl who looked like a child:

"This is Marie. I have spoken to you about her. . . . She spent all last night posting leaflets. This morning I saw people standing around and reading them, do you understand? They want to know what our Party is thinking. . . . She looks like a little girl, doesn't she? But I tell you, she understands absolutely everything. . . ."

There was that mournful gaiety about Marie that reminded Josette of her own girlhood. Josette saw Milet looking at the girl and the girl smiling to him in reply—gladly and shyly, and this timid love amidst the talk about domiciliary searches, calumny and persecution made her heart ache.

They were talking about sending parcels to the people under arrest when Mado rang at the door. She felt at once that she was out of place here, a stranger. Why did I come? . . . These people have no time for me. . . . Mado felt that she had brought with her the boredom and make believe of Corbeille. They must hate me. . . .

Milet and Marie went into the next room. Mado asked:

"Have you had any news from Henri?"

"Of course. He was sick in the autumn, but he's all right now. Conditions are very hard, though..."

Mado did not know what else to say, she got up. She looked so bewildered that Josette felt sorry for her.

"You are fond of music, aren't you? ... I'll play something for you."

"What is she playing?" thought Mado. "It's solemn and simple. Those are the sounds that trees and rain make. ... So Josette too loves art! Lives a double life! ... But Josette is not one of that sort. ... Music is supreme—there is no need to describe or to depict. Music is—time. First premonition, then an avenue, rain, life, now it is all dying out. The train will leave soon. Softer. ... The end. ..."

"Thank you."

And Mado took her leave.

"It is very dark outside," said Josette. "Milet has a flashlight, he will see you to the Metro."

The flashlights of passers-by looked like fireflies. Milet zealously lit up the path—he did everything zealously. Suddenly Mado said:

"Please tell Madame Lejean that Vlachov sends greetings to her and Henri. I forgot to tell her. ... It was silly of me—that is what I went there for."

"Why am I telling that awful lie?" Mado asked herself. "Pride? No. ... I couldn't help it, I had to say 'Vlachov' at least to that boy. It's a good thing it's dark. I shall never see him again. ..."

"I shall certainly tell her. I know Comrade Vlachov, he came to look over our shop. He understands absolutely everything, I spoke to him. ... They can tell all the lies they like, but I know that the Russians are with us, I have a picture hanging in my room, I cut it out of *Regards*—the Kremlin. ... Do you know who lives there? ..."

Lancier was waiting on tenterhooks for Mado's return. He saw how Marceline was suffering and was becoming desperate—he realized that he could do nothing to help her and ascribed this to his masculine awkwardness. He said to Mado in a tearful voice:

"Mama is very bad. Be quiet, I think she has dozed off. It was awful. ... Dr. Morillot said that it was—nerves, but perhaps he only said that to reassure me. ..."

Marceline was not asleep, she tried to smile to her daughter. The attack had passed off. She was now wondering why she had been so terribly frightened. Was it that she was afraid of death? No. ... It was hard to leave the living, Maurice—was as helpless as a child. Anybody could deceive and wrong him, induce him to do the most terrible things. Louis was at the front. And Mado is so restless, she seems to be going crazy. She loved her husband. She had nursed her children, had devoted all her life to the family, and now everything was about to fall to pieces. ...

Just before dawn Lancier decided to take a rest—Marceline was sleeping; he said to Mado:

"I had such a fright. Why, Mama asked us to send for the priest."

Mado sat at her mother's bedside. What a happiness it was to believe! One could call the priest and feel relief at once. . . . Sergei had said: "One must believe." Of course, he believed in something else. . . . And Milet believed. Yes, it is very important to believe—more important than knowing, it is—knowing and something else besides. . . . It is awful if you don't believe. . . . But what about Louis? . . . I don't know whether he believes in anything. . . . He is very superstitious, he will say something—and touch wood, would refuse to be the thirteenth at table. Perhaps it's because he is an airman. . . . He is brave, but the letters he writes are full of sadness. They don't know what the war is about. . . . If Sergei is in Finland, he knows. . . . He does not fear death. Nor does Mama. . . . But they are so different. I'm getting confused. . . .

She went to the window. It was a moonlit night, and the moon was large, very bright, and very cold. Why was the moon given to lovers? It makes one want to howl. . . . The moon—is for death, and everything under its light is poisoned, frozen, lifeless. What if Mama dies? . . .

Day dawned. Mado's eyes were open, but she did not see, she was not thinking, she mechanically listened to the feeble breathing of her mother.

Milet came hurrying back to Josette in such a state of excitement that he was unable to utter a word. He threw his arms around Josette and wanted to do the same to Marie but was too shy, at last he burst out:

"Vlakhov sends you greetings! And Henri. Do you understand? Can you imagine it—he remembers! . . . Wonderful! That's the kind of friends we have!"

He became lost in thought and then suddenly enquired in a low voice:

"Josette, is that woman one of us?"

"No."

"I thought she was. I couldn't understand why she looked so dejected. . . . Have you any more leaflets left, Josette?"

"Paul has taken a packet to Ivry."

"That's good, give me a hundred, I'll go to Montrouge, and Marie will go home, she must get some sleep. . . ."

They went off arm in arm.

Josette recalled Mado's visit. Why had she not spoken about Vlakhov's letter when she was here? . . . She's a strange girl, everything about her is sincere, comes from the heart, and yet it is all fancy. . . . I must let Henri know that the Russian has written. . . . It's late, I wonder where Paul has got to? Josette had tried to dissuade her son from taking part in the underground work: "You are too young, wait a while," she had said, but in vain. He had merely smiled and said: "If you don't

want me to work with you, I will go to my Young Communist Leaguers." Why, he was still a boy.... How comically Milet praised his girl—"she understands absolutely everything."... They are still children! They ought to be dancing, rowing, romping about. But these were stern times.... Henri writes that everything is all right, but the comrades say that—they are being humiliated, tortured, that they are trying to drive them out of their minds. But they won't break them.... What strength these children possess!... And there are lots and lots of us.... No doubt, at the other end of the town, some other Milet is now posting up leaflets. And in Lyons, and in Nice. And in London. Perhaps also even in Berlin.... This thought soothed Josette, she felt the warmth of friendly hands. Tired, she lay down on the couch. Paul ought to be back soon.... Henri was fond of resting with three pillows under his head. He used to say: "I'm dreaming."... I wonder how he is getting on now? She thought of him tenderly, like a mother—of his prison cot, the cold, sickness, loneliness. Rarely did she indulge in introspection, but just now the thought flashed through her mind with extraordinary solemnity: we love each other, strongly—to the end, unto death.

* 24 *

"Is it really nerves?" Professor Dumas asked the doctor when they left Corbeille.

"Angina pectoris. The first signal."

They remained silent for a long time, both were sorry for Madame Lancier, and both were of the age when death lurks not far away. And besides, the scene at the supper table had upset them, involuntarily their thoughts passed from Marceline to France.

It was hard to say what the friendship between these two men rested on; they neither resembled nor suited each other. Dumas was a great scientist, while Dr. Morillot was an ordinary district practitioner, who did not worry much about the latest discoveries in medical science, knew perfectly well that his abilities were limited, and looked upon science as a laborious trade. Dumas might have been called a cheerful enthusiast, whereas Morillot laughed at everything, believed neither in discoveries nor in reforms, and would say: "The more things change the more they remain the same." And yet they liked each other. Dumas, the bachelor, felt quite at home at the doctor's house. At one time he used to give Morillot's boys—Pierre and René—pick-a-back rides every Sunday. That was long ago.

"I had a long letter from René yesterday," said the doctor. "He is on the Maginot Line. He cracks jokes about it. He says: 'We feel here as if we have been at war for a hundred years and are thirsting for peace—it is a hangover without any night before.' ... They say

that Pierre will be called up in April. If this music lasts so long, that is. . . ."

And again they walked on in silence thinking of the same thing. Morillot at last broke the silence:

"That was very silly of me. . . . But who would have thought? . . . Even now I don't understand how they know Roy. But there's nothing surprising about it when you come to think of it—everybody who's appointed now is either a downright idiot or an utter scoundrel. Perhaps Marceline is right—he's a spy. . . . How do you expect to carry on war under such conditions? . . ."

Dumas neither argued nor agreed. They walked along slowly in the darkness, distrustfully groping for the curbstones with their feet.

"Never mind, we'll muddle through," Dumas growled suddenly.

"I doubt it. France is a fine house, I don't deny it, but nobody wants to defend it. It's probably because nobody feels that he is master in it. The day before yesterday I was called to a patient, a worker employed at Berty's plant, a case of pleurisy. One of his shopmates was there. We began to talk. Both, of course, are Communists, or something like it. You can't imagine the angry mood they are in, they don't believe a word, they say it's all bunk, that the Cagouards are no better than the Nazis, and so forth. I haven't met Berty for a long time, but I am convinced that he prefers the Germans to compatriots like these. The country is all falling to pieces. But there is really nothing to be surprised at—nations become senile, like individuals. The Americans will jump forward now. They have no Corneille, all they have is chewing gum, but they are devilishly young. We, however, have outlived our time. So it's no use expecting anything good. . . . You said that we would not surrender Prague, that we would reach an agreement with the Russians, that Hitler would not dare to start. . . . I'd like to know when you'll drop your optimism—five minutes to twelve, or five minutes after?"

Dumas puffed at his pipe so hard that sparks flew into the night.

"Why should I drop it? The sores are on the surface. What is Roy? I ask you, what is Nivelle? Pimples, that's all! Can a nation suddenly commit suicide? Is it a sentimental high school boy? Or a Stock Exchange broker? A nation is—bread, sweat, genius. I don't know what the people will do when they interfere in this dirty business at last. But hang it all, France can't end with that topper Daladier, with that fat-nosed scoundrel Bonnet—fancy men like those after Robespierre and Saint-Just! When I see a painter painting a wall, a cobbler hammering on a sole and an electrician putting up wires, I feel fine at once—France still lives! Listen to me, doctor, perhaps we shall not see the dawn, but it is impossible to believe in an accursed night like this. . . ."

And indeed it was night, not a light, not even that cotton wool, dark-grey mist that sometimes mitigates the gloom; the blacked-out houses were not there, the city looked like a forest. Suddenly, out of the darkness, came the wailing of an infant. Dr. Morillot livened up:

"The new generation, my dear professor—the anthropologist of the twenty-first century. You can imagine how he will envy you—your Marie and her sauces, your pipe, your optimism. I am convinced that in sixty years' time our times will seem like an idyll, a rustic idyll, a paradise...."

In reply Dumas whistled ironically.

"Eh, you... Anatole France!... I don't understand how you heal the sick, you can drive a healthy man into his grave with tirades like that.... When climbing a mountain, you always feel it would be better not to go any higher. Until you reach the pass.... But once you start, you must go to the end...."

"And not trip up. Be careful, I think there's a curb here."

PART TWO

* 1 *

VALYA was four years older than Natasha, but notwithstanding that, the girls soon became friends. What Natasha liked about Valya was that she never drove anything to a point, neither thoughts nor words. She is so elusive—Natasha thought about her—I suppose all actresses are like that. . . . Valya felt lonesome in Moscow and longed for her friends of the Pickwick Club; she felt better in the company of merry and talkative Natasha.

Natasha was celebrating her birthday—she was twenty years old. Her father had made her a present of a lovely wristwatch. Every now and again Natasha raised her wrist to her ear and exclaimed with astonishment: "It's going"—she imagined that the tiny watch could not go on her thick red wrist.

It was a beautiful day, the spring, bright and boisterous, had commenced. In the evening the guests arrived: Valya Steshenko, Olga, and, of course, Vasya. When her friends discussed whom to invite to a party they always said: "Natasha and Vasya"—you could not think of them apart. They met often, without stopping to think what it was that drew them to each other. Usually Natasha did the talking, Vasya smiled, but said nothing. Just as on the day on which they first became acquainted, when thinking of Natasha he would say to himself: "A nice girl!" Dmitri Alexeyevich once said to his daughter: "I like your Vlachov. Do you understand?" Without a shade of embarrassment Natasha answered: "Of course I understand, I like him too. . . ."

Natasha had also invited Sergei. For a long time she pondered over the question: would Olga be offended if she were invited without her husband? Dmitri Alexeyevich didn't like Labazov, nor could Natasha take a liking to him: he was so lifeless. . . . She did not invite Labazov. Olga was offended, but she did not show it, she only said that

Semyon Ivanovich had written a fine article about the importance of showing consideration for other people.

The young people were very merry, but Dmitri Alexeyevich seemed to be merrier than all. He started the dancing, he danced a waltz with Valya, hopped in the old-fashioned way, and whirled his partner round so swiftly that Valya pleaded: "Dmitri Alexeyevich, I'm quite giddy. . . ." Then they played forfeits, guessed words, composed foolish verses, and again Dmitri Alexeyevich excelled. He failed to guess a word and had to pay a forfeit—to tell fortunes. He wound a Turkish towel round his head and went into Natasha's room, spread out a pack of cards and began to rack his brains: what's higher—a queen or a king? The first to go in to him was Natasha. Her father yelled at her:

"What, you? Nothing doing! You know everything without me! Better send him in here. . . ."

When Vasya came in Dmitri Alexeyevich forgot all about telling fortunes—he took a small volume of verse from the shelf, got interested, and began to shout, waving the book above his head:

"It's positively amazing! Just a jumble of words, but do you know, it's thrilling!

*Behind your serene shoulders
The flutter of wings I hear. . .
Within me throbs with gleaming eyes
The angel of the storm—Asrael! . . .*

"...Now that's—poetry! Not what Labazov shouted over the telephone: 'Thirty-two lines for Women's Day! . . .'"

Natasha asked:

"Well, did Papa tell your fortune right?"

"Quite! Hit the nail on the head," answered Vasya.

Looking into Olga's serene eyes Dmitri Alexeyevich became flustered:

"In a minute, I'll tell you everything in a minute. My mother used to tell fortunes—'what will soothe the heart?' And it will certainly be soothed! I will show you all the tricks: troubles, next come hearts—you know what object they represent, well, next comes a pleasant journey; I don't know which you prefer—Anapa or Malakhovka. . . ."

Krylov would not tell Sergei's fortune—he had had enough of it.

"Tell me how the people amuse themselves in Paris. Dance, I suppose, and dance so as to crack the floorboards. . . ."

He listened to the long story that Sergei told him. Suddenly he became gloomy:

"I'm worried about them. The disorder there must be terrific. The Germans prepared all the winter. It's a good thing they are a gay

lot. We are not monks either. . . . But one must also be able to groan, to suffer. . . ."

Valya waited patiently at the door: she was eager to have Dmitri Alexeyevich tell her fortune. But he had forgotten that he was a fortune teller, and when she came into the room he was about to bark at her as if she were a patient. But he checked himself in time, remembered that he was a fakir, swept the cards away with his sleeve and began an incantation:

"Bardi, alasagardi, ballasagardi. . . . I see all. . . . She came. He came. She looked. He looked. Alasabardi. . . . Do you understand? By the way, he tells some wonderful stories about Paris, you ask him. And now—off you go and dance! He'll twist you around so that you'll never untwist yourself. . . ."

Valya racked her brains: How could Dmitri Alexeyevich have noticed that I like him? For the life of me I cannot understand. I have not shown it in any way, surely? . . . But I like him, that's true. His brother is just ordinary. He's not. . . . Strange that an engineer should be like a poet, or an actor. . . . It would be good to have a man like that for a friend.

"Goodbye." Sergei smiled. "I don't know your patronymic."

"Alexeyevna."

"Valentina Alexeyevna. But may I call you simply Valya, as Dmitri Alexeyevich does?"

For a long time after she remembered: He pronounced my name "**Valya**" as if he liked me. . . .

On his way home from Natasha's Sergei met Zamkov. They walked on together. Zamkov talked long about the war situation—fighting would commence in the West soon. Perhaps the Germans would get the upper hand, but after such battles they wouldn't be formidable. . . . Sergei was absent-minded, he thought about Paris, about Mado. Zamkov fell silent. A little later he said:

"Do you remember Petya? That lad you met at Labazov's wedding. . . . Labazov teased him then about always wanting to push himself forward. . . . He was killed. We only heard of it yesterday. He celebrated New Year's Eve with us, and after that he kept begging to be sent to Finland. We always thought he was a windbag. . . . He turned out to be a hero. . . . It was during the attack on the Mannerheim Line. . . . He's been given a posthumous decoration. His mother came to tell us. . . . But to return to the international situation. . . ."

Sergei said good night to him and turned down a side-street. He vaguely recalled Petya's face. It brought the war nearer at once. . . . He had danced, laughed, had said that he was writing sketches. . . . That's what it will be with us. . . . I don't know how the French. . . . The doctor was right—one must also be able to suffer. . . .

The delivery was prolonged and severe. Everybody lost hope; even Professor Richet, known for his coolness, thought that Léontine would not live through it.

But she did live through it, and in the dazzling days of the Paris spring she lay in bed adoring her son; she gazed into his bright eyes that looked like two drops of pale blue enamel; those eyes seemed to her to be filled with profound meaning. She thought the infant's face bore not only Léo's features, but also his expression; she went into raptures over his tiny hands; she told him long stories, scarcely breathed when he clung to her breast. Her son had relieved her of that acute, unbearable anxiety about Léo.

Until that time her husband had filled her whole life. He had found her, a little grisette, like tens of thousands of others, in the dusty square of a Paris suburb and had given her happiness. He was twelve years older than Léontine; he took her to the theatre, explained to her the mysteries of art, told her the stories he had read in books and amused her with tales about his own turbulent youth. He devoted to her the soul of an unsuccessful dramatist, of a gold seeker who had been flung into the world of age-old conventions. When he went to Lyons, to America or, as was the case last year, to Kiev, she hibernated, like the forest in winter. They had lived eight years together, but her love was as acute and as reckless as it had been during the first days of their acquaintanceship, when, a foolish girl, she had given herself to Léo without a thought for the future.

She had long dreamed of having a child. Fate was unkind: the war started in the third month of her pregnancy. On first seeing Léo in a military greatcoat she had wept bitterly: she had pictured him lying wounded in a vast, deserted field. In vain had her husband explained to her that the only thing that threatened him on the frontier of neutral Belgium was not an enemy bullet, but dull winter evenings; she could not be appeased. When Léo went away she gave free rein to her tears. A few days without a letter were a torment to her, and only now did she feel at peace: her son was a pledge of their early reunion; in the tiny face, now innocent and now agedly wise, she recognized Léo, and gazing at the chestnut trees in bloom outside the window she smiled at her restored happiness. So cheerful had she become that she began to make preparations for her departure for Bidart.

The telegram went astray, and Léo learned of the birth of his son only two weeks after the event. Boisterous in his joy, he read Léontine's letter to everybody, to his comrades in his platoon, to Lieutenant Garchay, to the tavernkeeper's wife, and to the inhabitants of the village where they were quartered; he repeated the most impor-

tant passages over and over again. The boy was of normal weight, he was very lively, his mother said that he took after his father, and Madame Chardonnet—Léo could not for the life of him recall who that charming creature was—said: "She had never seen such a fine child in all her life."...

Only one thing marred Léo's joy: his son had been named Robert. There was nothing surprising in that: far back in the autumn they had decided that if it was a boy they would call him Robert. Léo realized that a Parisian could not be named Naum, but he recalled his father often now, and he would have liked, at least by the sound of his name, to revive the shade of the mad tailor of Slobodka. And besides, his old mother would be grieved at the fact that her grandson had not been named after her departed husband.... But it could not be helped: his son—was a Frenchman.... And Léo said to his comrades: "Robert is a nice name, I think."...

The next day he decided to write to Léontine; this was a long report on paternal bliss. But before he could finish his letter Sergeant Dublé came running in, shouting excitedly:

"The Germans have broken through!..."

This sounded so absurd that Léo swore: Dublé's drunk already and it's not noon yet!... He finished the letter, carefully sealed the envelope and went into the village. Here he realized at once what had happened. The roads flowed like molten lava: women with hand-carts, staff headquarters automobiles, motor-buses crammed with Belgians, nuns, artillerymen, Customs officials, children who had strayed from their parents, transport servicemen, men without officers and officers without men, carts loaded with furniture, tanks, herds of cattle—all intermingling, and all streaming southward. Overturned cars, arm-chairs and packing cases lined the roadside. The panic had broken out suddenly and no orders could now check this flood. Nobody knew precisely what had happened; it was said that German tanks had broken into the rear, that the sappers had not managed to blow up the bridges, that the generals had been bribed; there was talk about the surrender of two armies, of burning cities, of the strength of the Germans; rumours grew as the crowd of refugees grew. The troops marching from the South collided with this frantic mass of people, with terrified prefects, with pale orderlies who were searching for their generals, with women who were hysterically rushing about among the carts, automobiles and tractors amidst clouds of acrid, scorching dust; and the soldiers who were marching to the front line turned back and still further swelled the torrent.

Somebody shouted that it was useless running away; the Germans were in front. But the people only quickened their pace. Léo was carried away by the general flood. The blow was too sudden; only

that morning he had seen Léontine as if she were standing in front of him, pink and warm; she was nursing her son. The war was ever so far away, in Norway.... What had happened? Where had the Germans come from?... France was stronger, was she not?—he dully asked himself, and then he laughed bitterly: how they have deceived us!... He wanted to tear up the newspaper, strike Nivelle, rush into the Chamber of Deputies and curse long and loud.

At night, feeling utterly worn out, he sank to the ground a little distance from the road. He awoke at dawn. He looked at the road jammed with automobiles and at once remembered everything. What a dirty trick! ... He was no longer afraid, he was enraged. He felt better after he had heartily cursed two transport servicemen who were hysterically shouting "Germans!" He had a wash. A bird was twittering in the oat field. And in answer Léo sang; that was the kind of man he was, he was not easily disheartened; he sang his favourite ditty:

*When the spring returns
Fortune will smile....*

Towards evening he managed to find several men from his company. Lieutenant Garchay had mustered half a hundred men from different units. They spent the night in a deserted village. Next day they were incorporated in a reserve regiment; they were ordered to dig themselves in. Here and there resistance began to be put up against the enemy. Léo worked zealously with a spade, dropped flat on the ground—some German bombers appeared—and again took up his spade—to bury the men who had been killed by a bomb. The regimental commander had gone off to see the General and had not returned. Lieutenant Garchay tried to establish contact with Divisional Headquarters but failed. Several German tanks appeared on the highroad. The men raised an outcry:

"What are we doing here!"

"This is a trap!..."

"The devil take them all! The General must already be in Paris..."

They marched southward, trying to keep as far from the road as possible. They came to a river and stopped; there was no bridge; Garchay said that it would be easy to hold up the enemy here. Just before dawn some German scouts appeared. Léo laid one out, he was not a bad shot. He was as pleased as a child: the nightmare was over, the Germans could be checked! ... The morning passed off quietly, the men cheered up, they took their breakfast. At midday a major arrived, without getting out of his car he heard Garchay's report and then said:

"I congratulate you. I will report this to the General. The situation is bad, orders are—abandon position, fortify on the Oise."

This went on for a month. Léo had by now learned the rules of this frightful game: they retreated from river to river, from hill to hill, lay flat when German aircraft came over, crawled in the dark along field paths and tracks, and always the Germans were in front; the officers made enquiries at Staff Headquarters but could get no explanation: sometimes a dispatch would come—an order to retreat once again; sometimes somebody would shout in desperation to the transport servicemen: "Stop, canailles!" The Colonel said to the Captain: "It's all over," and changed into civvies; the priest asserted that the German tanks were—a punishment for the People's Front; and nothing could be done—they retreated, retreated, retreated every day; the inhabitants fled with them; and for a month Léo saw the same road of shame, littered with abandoned guns, gasmasks, straw hats and armchairs.

It was no longer people who were in flight, not a regiment, not a city, it was France, bereft of her senses, still alive, infuriated and frightened, ready to die, but saving a trunk, a ball dress, a tennis racket. The country was unrecognizable: ruined, abandoned, burning, it resembled a vast wilderness which could not be crossed in forty years.

The Seine was now behind them! . . . They turned to the south-west. And again spades, again bombs, again retreat. More frightful than the ruins were the peaceful houses that looked like the house in Bidart, the walls covered with fragrant wistarias, gardens with roses and stock, open windows revealing the simple, last moment secrets—a cup lying at the foot of a baby's chair, a book which had dropped to the floor, a shaving brush with the lather dried on it.

"This is where I live," said the soldier who was marching by Léo's side, and he laughed, laughed too loud. His comrades looked round, nobody uttered a word. The village was deserted, only the cows in the courtyards lowed desperately to be milked.

The men no longer argued, they no longer even swore; at rare intervals they exchanged curt phrases: "German tanks," "Marais won't last until we get to the village," "Give me a light." . . .

Among the ruins Léo caught sight of a blue signpost "Orléans." He had stayed here with Léontine on their way back to Paris from Bidart. The old houses had astonished Léontine, she had said: "How strange, people have lived here, they have long been forgotten, but the houses still stand, and aren't they beautiful, nicer than the new ones." . . . Then they had sat in a café on the bank of the Loire and had sipped pale fragrant wine, and Léontine had said: "I want you as much as I wanted you on the first night! . . ."

Léo held his nose—the stench was awful; it was a sultry day; hundreds of corpses were lying around, all mixed up—women, children, soldiers, horses, a fat priest, and by his side a small dog with a dazzling white, fluffy coat, like plush. . . .

On a wall Léo saw inscriptions: “Jean, I was here on 6/VI in the morning. Roger is alive!” “Lasset and his family have gone to Angoulême,” “Anybody who sees Captain Delombard please tell him that I was here with the child on Wednesday,” “Pierre, I cannot wait.” . . . Léo felt a lump rise in his throat. In all probability Léontine had been here but had not had time to write “Léo, I am still alive and Robert is alive.” . . . Now she must be lying with their son under the debris of this house. And he held his nose—the stench. . . .

“It stinks, something awful!” said a comrade. “Let’s get out of here quick! . . .”

Léo obediently went on, but first he looked closely into the face of a woman who was lying near the wall. She, too, must have written something. . . .

In every town and village they passed through he anxiously scanned the walls, the white, grey and ochre walls of churches, mairies and schools. He saw the names of Jeanne, Louise, Denise, Lucie, Thérèse, Marie, Françoise—but there was no Léontine. . . .

He laughed at himself: how is it possible to find one person among millions! But he searched nevertheless.

* 3 *

On that frightful day when demented Paris departed from abandoned Paris, Mado came to Léontine. Biting her lips, Léontine gazed at her with large unseeing eyes. The events of the past few weeks had crushed her. Ten times a day she took up a newspaper and tried to understand what was in it, ten times a day she rushed to the radio set, but her weeping drowned the voice of the announcer who was talking about the fighting in Norway. She did not know whom to ask—what had happened? Where is France? Where is the army? Where is Léo? A horrible picture hovered before her eyes: a vast, deserted field, and Léo lying in the middle, with blood on his face, vivid and thick, like paint. She pressed her child to her breast and for hours on end kept repeating: “Rob! . . . Rob! . . .”

Mado was calm with the calmness of irremediable disaster. She did not express surprise, she asked no questions; she met many people, but she was the only one who had lost all hope. Perhaps she had been prepared for the disaster by the frightful words Sergei had uttered? . . . Lancier was still in a state of feverish excitement. When

Morillot told him that the Germans were in Rouen, he dragged out a suitcase and convulsively stuffed it with all sorts of useless knick-knacks. An hour later Sembat came running in: "I congratulate you! Russia has declared war on Italy..." Lancier believed him and threw his arms around Mado: "I always said that we must not quarrel with the Russians." Abandoning the open suitcase, he ran to the radio set and fussed with it for an hour trying to get Moscow, at last he heard a broadcast in English; Moscow was telling about the Agricultural Exhibition. Lancier yelled: "They are fooling us again!... Let's go!..."

Mado was obliged to keep her wits about her, to keep cool, and to think for the whole family. Two weeks ago her mother had had another attack. The professors had said: "The chief thing—is absolute quiet." In peacetime, of course, it was easy to conceal financial embarrassments, or family unpleasantnesses from a patient: but where was one to find quiet now?... The city was demented. It seemed as though in another minute the bronze statues would jump from their bases and go rushing beyond the Loire.... But for all that, Mado managed to calm her mother, she told her that the capital was being evacuated according to plan, that the Germans would be checked not far from Paris as had been the case in nineteen fourteen and that news had been received from Louis—he was alive and in the rear, Lancier could not bear to hear these tales, he would clutch at his head and run away—suffocated by tears.

When the last doubt had been dispelled and Lancier resolved to leave Paris, Mado went to fetch Léontine. She said quietly:

"Do you know what has happened?"

Léontine shrieked:

"Léo?..."

"No, no, calm yourself! Nothing has happened to your husband. You can believe me, I give you my word of honour. Nothing!... But you must dress at once. I could scarcely get to you—all the streets are jammed with automobiles. Mother is very bad, but it can't be helped.... Tomorrow may be too late. The Germans have crossed the Seine...."

Léontine had got it into her head that Léo would come for her without fail. How could she go away? He would come and find the apartment deserted.... She would never find him, for there was no longer an army, nor France. If he is alive he will come for her. But what if he really is lying in the middle of that field?... Well, then let the Germans come, let them kill her and her boy.... She must wait for Léo in Paris.

She realized that nobody would agree with her arguments, and so she lied to Mado—calmly, very calmly, she told her that the doctor

was coming to see the child in two hours' time—the boy was sick, and after that she was going to Bordeaux, her neighbour—Professor Sauger—was taking her.

Mado argued with her, insisted—Léontine could not risk the life of her son. But Léontine, usually weak-willed and obedient, was adamant. There was such powerful stubbornness in her large bright eyes that Mado stopped talking, impulsively kissed Léontine and went away.

Léontine sat motionless all day, waiting for Léo. The streets were in constant turmoil—that was Paris riding, walking, running away; motor trucks loaded with children, cyclists, people with hand carts and wheelbarrows trying to get ahead of each other. It was difficult to say what conveyed their desperation most—the honk-honk of ambulance cars or children's cries: "Mama!..." The night was pitch dark, people were afraid to betray themselves even by a tiny match light; never had the city been so dark.... And the honking of claxons, the patter of feet and the shouting did not cease for an instant. But Léontine stood listening for sounds from the deserted staircase which nobody ascended—everybody had left the house, she was waiting for Léo.

Next morning it flashed upon her that Léo would not come; she snatched up her child and dashed into the street. She ran down the long boulevard to the Porte d'Orléans, fearing that she would not be able to get away from the Germans in time. Now she was thinking that if only she could get to the Loire she would be safe—Léo was there.... Soon her strength gave out; she sat down on a chair that had been thrown out of a house. Not a car was in sight: all those who possessed automobiles had already left the city. People were streaming past, some carrying children on their shoulders. Léontine saw a small car trying to squeeze through the crowd and she waved her hand. A man wearing a cap was at the wheel. The car stopped. The man in the cap did not ask her what she wanted, everything was clear without words. Two women and a little girl were sitting in the back seat, they shouted something. The man in the cap silently pulled out a big suitcase that was standing by his side and said to Léontine: "Get in."

They drove forty kilometres, they were obliged to crawl—car behind car; then they had a breakdown and they were held up until the morning. The women took care of Rob. Léontine scarcely understood what they were saying, but she kept saying with a wan smile: "Thanks! A thousand thanks!..." But the man in the cap said nothing.

On the third day they caught sight of the broad Loire; there was no bridge; they drove along the right bank. Soon they were obliged to stop: a vast number of cars had collected, people said that two trucks had collided and the road was blocked. Suddenly a droning was heard in the sky. The man in the cap shouted: "Run and lie

down!" Léontine ran to the edge of a potato field; she dropped flat to the ground. What she feared most was that somebody might step upon her child. The explosion was terrific; Léontine was buried under a pile of earth. She thought that this was—death, at first she was even glad—she won't have to go on any further, but then she caught fright: they might have killed me!... Rob was crying, and this calmed her. She looked for the man in the cap and the two women, but they were gone... Had they been killed, or had they run off?...

Léontine lay there for several hours and then went on further. Late at night she knocked at a house; she begged to be allowed to stay the night. She offered money. The master of the house said: "I don't want any money," but his wife hurriedly took the treasury note and kept on repeating: "What trouble, what awful trouble!..." She gave Léontine some food and then took her upstairs: "Rest here."... Léontine had not slept for two nights, she lay down on a high peasant bed and fell asleep at once.

She was awakened by a terrific commotion, she thought that somebody was breaking down the door. She leaped out of bed and saw flames. She pressed her child to her breast and dashed out of the house. Tears were streaming from her eyes from the smoke; her mind was in an utter whirl: after running some distance she sat down on a curbstone. The flames had spread across the sky, black and red. She undid her blouse in order to feed Rob. And suddenly she shrieked,, shrieked so loud that one would think she could be heard ten leagues away. But nobody heard her: people were trying to save their belongings from the burning houses.

When day dawned the peasant who had given her shelter the night before came up to her; he looked and went away without saying a word. Some women ran up, wept and said: "Why didn't you wrap something round his head?..."

Léontine convulsively pressed the dead child to her breast. Her lips moved, her eyes were wide open, it seemed as though she did not blink. She rocked Rob in her arms, soundlessly repeating the cradle song her mother had once sung to her:

*Sleep my little one,
Sleep my birdie,
Sleep my baby,
Sleep my chick! ...*

At midday four Germans arrived; they looked at Léontine and turned away. She sat on the curbstone the whole day, the evening and the night. Next morning a German soldier halted near her; he had a Red Cross armlet on his sleeve. He wanted to take the child—she refused to let him take it; she struggled. Then he called his comrades; one of them spoke French; he said:

"Madame, he must be buried."

They called a priest; he was a German in military uniform; he drew a lace mantle and a prayer book from his knapsack and mumbled something. The soldiers felt hot, and the grave they dug was a tiny one, as if they were going to plant flowers. They held Léontine tight—she was struggling all the time to take the body of her child. The German who spoke French tried to calm her:

"You must not take this so much to heart, Madame, you are young, you will have many more children yet."

An officer studied her papers for a long time and at last said:

"Schmidt, take her to the mustering centre. She's—a Parisienne. . . ."

Léontine was led to a small wood; several hundred people were already there—women with children, and old people. Léontine did not weep; she was indifferent to everything; even the wailing of small children failed to rouse her from her stupor. An old woman gave her some bread and chocolate. Léontine thanked her.

The women with children were taken on motor trucks. Léontine walked several kilometres along the scorching white road and sank to the ground. She was put on a motor truck. In Paris she mechanically walked to her house; the door of her apartment was wide open. "I did not lock it when I went away," thought Léontine to herself. The rooms were in a state of disorder; evidently somebody had searched the cupboards. Dresses. Léo's suits, neckties and a bathing costume were scattered on the floor. On catching sight of some diapers Léontine at last burst into tears. And until late in the night the Germans bawled:

Valleri-vallera!
Juchheirassassa. .

* 1 *

Mado recalled the evening near Tours with horror. It was one of those bright evenings of early summer when the jasmines bloomed, and the earth, not yet scorched by the July sun, was trustfully green. All around there were vineyards, slate roofs and a weather cock on a steeple. Lancier stood in the road, next to a bird-cherry bush in full bloom. Marceline was lying on the trampled grass; her face was contorted with pain, she felt as though someone had crushed her breast with a rock. They are burying me alive—she thought to herself.

They had run out of petrol—had been standing there for three hours. A sergeant riding past on a motorcycle told them that the Germans were twenty kilometres away. Lancier repeated: "They are near Tours! Do you hear that, Mado, near Tours! . . ." Tears rolled down

his cheeks. Mado looked at her mother, but she didn't know what to do to help her.

It was Berty who saved them. Lancier regarded his appearance as a miracle; but Berty confessed to Mado that he had been following them all the time, and when their car had got stranded he had gone off to Tours and obtained a capacious car; Madame Lancier could finish the journey with the least discomfort; there was enough petrol to take them to Bordeaux. Berty related all this later. At this moment he only hastened to calm Lancier: the German advance units were a hundred and fifty kilometres away, and Madame Lancier could peacefully spend the night in Tours; he added that he had with difficulty obtained a room, which, of course, he would place at the sick woman's disposal.

"You have saved Marceline," said Lancier, deeply moved. "This is the second time you have helped me out. On the first occasion it was with money—but this is something different. It's in moments like these that one gets to know one's true friends..."

"Why the vineyards?" thought Mado. "There's a castle. Poets wrote verses, a caretaker showed tourists the halls with carved ceilings, fountains played in the garden... A fragile world of fantasy, it has collapsed. A limousine is exchanged for a can of petrol. People are abandoning everything—their shops, their houses, their pictures. And the poet is cursing for a glass of water. Everybody seems to have undressed, France is—naked. It is not important that Poussin once existed, that in this park deaf Ronsard listened to the resonance of verse. All these are mere baubles. People live by other things—bread, and perhaps also by blood..."

Thanks to Berty they safely reached Bordeaux. Here Lancier recovered his spirits somewhat: perhaps the Germans would be checked after all? ... He was calmed by familiar faces—at every step he met Parisian friends; although everybody said "there is no way out," the presence of people bound to each other by years of prosperity seemed to Lancier to be a pledge that France had not perished. He himself said that the situation was hopeless, but he pronounced those bitter words with a barely perceptible smile, in his heart he hoped that he was a little heated and was exaggerating, as he had often done in the past. Marceline felt better. Somebody had told her that Louis was alive and well—he had been seen near the Swiss frontier. Lancier began to think about Bidart—the Germans would never get there. Léontine was no doubt there, and perhaps Léo would come... As for petrol, Berty would get some.

Bordeaux was totally unlike itself, its native inhabitants were lost among the noisy, bewildered but still self-assured Parisians; nobody felt like a refugee yet; people lived as if they were on the deck of a steamer. They slept in cafés, crowded round newspaper offices search-

ing for relatives, waiting for war news and communicating to each other all sorts of rumours—about the intervention of America, a government crisis, peace negotiations.

Lancier argued:

"We shall have to agree to a stalemate peace—the situation is indeed hopeless...."

Two days later panic swept into Bordeaux. The city was bombed; there were many casualties. People saw stretchers, corpses and blood on the asphalt. Crowds of soldiers poured into the city, unshaven, unwashed, and hungry. The soldiers related that the Germans were tearing along as if they were running a race; there were no anti-tank guns; contact was lost. The more impressionable hurried off to the Spanish frontier. There was a shortage of bread. People openly listened to the German broadcasts. Stuttgart asserted that Bordeaux was living its last hours.

Lancier said:

"I can't understand what's happened, Mado.... I was at Verdun, let the young people say what they like, but I know that Frenchmen are not cowards. But now the Germans are coming on as if they were riding to a picnic. They advanced another hundred kilometres yesterday. Where's our anti-tank artillery? For heaven's sake, tell me what's happening!"

"What's the use of asking me? I haven't even an idea how a gun is fired.... Everything was unstable. A house of cards. But we were convinced that soap bubbles would last forever.... We were convinced—but we didn't believe—in anything...."

Mado thought to herself: "I'm repeating what Sergei said. I recall him so rarely now, but he speaks for me.... It's silly—what could I, a young madcap, believe in? ... Only now do I see life...."

Lancier shouted:

"No, my dear, France is not a soap bubble. Be careful what you say! There's another explanation—there was too much politics. They say the generals are to blame—that I don't know, but the politicians are certainly to blame. We needed aircraft, but they organized debates, crises, strikes.... If Pétain would agree to become the head of France, it would be our salvation. He would stop the Germans—he's no politician, he's an old soldier."

The Lanciers took refuge in a small hotel near the docks; formerly this hotel had been frequented by minor colonial officials, sailors and soldiers who squandered their savings in the neighbouring taverns and brothels. Everything in the room spoke of drunken sprees and brawls—the cracked mirror, the filthy table, the stains on the walls. The surroundings fully harmonized with Maurice Lancier's mood: he felt lonely and reduced to beggary—France had been stolen from him.... Only recently his whole life had seemed integral and harmonious: his

young days in the Quartier latin, Marceline, Verdun, his work, his family, his collections at Corbeille.... Now, recalling the past, he realized how petty it had all been: a dream, a pleasant one perhaps, but only a dream.... How many friends he had had, but now he had no one to talk to about the most important thing. Everybody was engaged in the search for lodgings, food and petrol, everybody was nervous and quarrelsome. Berty was calm, but it was impossible to talk to him—he, as always, was so devilishly logical, and there are times when logic is unbearable....

And lo and behold, Léo walked into this disgusting room. They embraced silently—neither could express himself in words. Léo was in civvies, he was lean and looked haggard; but the tan on his face made him look younger; Lancier thought to himself—it's surprising, but he looks well....

"Where do you come from, Léo?..."

"From Bidart, Where's Léontine?"

"She went with Sauger."

"I have seen Sauger, he knows nothing about her...."

"I think she remained in Paris," said Mado.

Lancier wanted to calm Léo.

"If she remained, she did a good thing. You can't imagine what it was like on the road!..."

"I have seen...."

"How did you manage to find us?"

"I was convinced that you were in Bordeaux. Where else would you be, the whole of Paris is here, isn't it? I searched for you all day long yesterday, everybody had seen you—but nobody could give me any information about you. It's a good thing it occurred to me to ask Berty. Have you heard anything about Louis?"

"They say he is on the Swiss frontier, that's the quietest spot, he'll be able to get across to Geneva, we have friends there—old Sergent and his wife. Tell me, Léo, do you understand what's happening?"

"No, I don't. Or rather, I'm afraid I understand only too well. It is downright mockery! We wanted to fight. Even the most craven.... After all, there's not much pleasure in being constantly on the run, and with bombs dropping on you into the bargain.... But what I can't understand is: what sort of army command have we got? Nobody knows anything. The generals simply ask to be taken prisoner. Officers change into civvies and say: 'It's all up, anyhow.'... The times we held the Germans up—but each time the order came: 'Retreat.' Nothing was prepared—neither anti-tank guns nor aircraft. You have often told me that I am—a true Frenchman. That must be true, because just now I want to hang myself. Those gentlemen were

acting and overacted their parts. If there's a revolution, I'll be the first to join in. Better to die than see things like this!..."

In his heart Lancier agreed with Léo, but his loud voice and the hard things he said displeased him.

"A revolution will certainly not help matters, the country is ruined as it is, and nobody will be able to stand new shocks. What, have you given up fighting?"

"Nothing of the kind. The generals, they have stopped.... I put these civvies on so as not to frighten you—I was in rags and tatters.... My unit is gone. I've just been to the Commandant's office to ask to be assigned to another regiment, but there they say it is time to shut up shop.... The scoundrels! Where's Léontine? Where's my son? Nothing is left! ... Blown to atoms!"

In the evening they dined together in a restaurant. For a moment it seemed to them that they were in Paris, no Germans, no havoc—white tablecloths, girls' merry faces, obliging waiters.... They smoked in silence. Suddenly everything was hushed—Pétain's voice came over the radio. The voice was cracked, senile. He said that further resistance was useless and that he had sued the enemy for an armistice.

Tears appeared in Lancier's eyes.

"Do you hear that, Léo? ... That's a true Frenchman! Not a politician, he's—a soldier! ..."

"Shame!" roared Léo. "Outrageous! ... I told you that my brother is a—fanatic, that I didn't understand how they can live that way.... But I am sorry I am not a fanatic, do you understand? I would go out into the street and shout to my comrades.... We tramped those cursed fields together.... I would shout: Shoot! Shoot the Germans, shoot that old dodderer! ..."

Lancier flared up: how dared Léo insult the hero of Verdun? Beside himself with rage, he shouted in a squeaky voice:

"You say that because you are not a Frenchman! Your father, your grandfather didn't live here. They didn't build these towns, they didn't work in these fields. You don't care what becomes of France, you want ideas, politics. But the Marshal wants France. He wants to save French cities, French children. Do you understand me, or can't you understand? I said—French! ..."

Léo threw down his serviette and went out without saying a word.

On recovering his composure Lancier scolded himself: how could he go and offend Léo? Of course, Pétain is the only way out. But you couldn't quarrel with your best friend over politics! And Léo is, of course, a true Frenchman, it's simply that he's nervous, he's been with Communists, and they have turned his mind that way.... Late at night, assisted by Berty, Lancier found Léo.

"I was wrong, I got a little heated. We are all unstrung. That's quite natural. And on top of all that, there's Marceline....

But friendship—is friendship. Embrace me, show me that you are not angry. . . .”

Léo smiled. But whether because it seemed so to Lancier, or that Léo really could not forget the insult, they felt embarrassed, chose their words, remained silent for long intervals.

Two days later Léo said:

“I’m going to Paris, Léontine must be there.”

Lancier thought to himself: that’s risky, why, the Germans will see at once that Léo—is a Jew. But how could he tell him that? He might take offence again. . . .

“Don’t you think that’s premature?”

“Hundreds of thousands are going back. Of course, I would not go back for anything. But Léontine. . . .”

“You must weigh everything up. You know yourself what kind of prejudices those Germans have. . . .”

“Perhaps not only the Germans have them,” answered Léo in a hard voice. “But Léontine and my boy are in Paris. They are all I have left. . . .”

When Léo went away Lancier felt lonely again. Bertie found two decent rooms for the Lanciers; he was solicitous but morose, and brightened up only when he saw Mado.

In the dismal dawn of a rainy day Marceline died. She died in great pain, she was conscious to the end. At what a time she was leaving her dear ones! . . . Louis was missing, perhaps killed; Mado had been lifeless for a long time; Maurice had become an old man. France was prostrate and dying, like herself. . . . And neither the last sacrament nor Mado’s eyes, overflowing with love, could alleviate her suffering.

“If Louis comes back, tell him. . . .”

She could not say any more; those were her last words.

It would be difficult to imagine a more mournful funeral, although Bertie had done all he could. The wind raised a blinding dust. Lancier walked in front. Suddenly the hearse stopped—the road was blocked by German tanks; the Germans would not make way for the cortege. The hearse waited at the street corner for over an hour. The dust whirled around them. The Germans sang. And Lancier wept loudly, like an old woman.

When Mado was handed a spade to throw some earth onto the coffin she felt as though she was burying everything—the last thread that had bound her to life had snapped.

Bertie stood a little distance away; then he took Lancier and Mado home. Lancier sobbed:

“I was here with Marceline during our honeymoon, and twice after that. She loved Bordeaux, she said that everything here smelled of vanilla and bananas. . . . Why was I not killed by a German bomb? . . .”

During her last days Marceline had constantly thought of her son; Louis was actually in Bordeaux, but he did not know that his mother was dying very close by. He met Mado accidentally in the post office. They forthwith went to the cemetery.

"Mama wanted to leave a message for you, but she died before she could tell us what it was...."

Louis had worshipped his mother: boisterous, always taken up with one thing or another, ambitious, he had loved his mother for her unworldliness, her simplicity and gentleness. He stood for a long time near the newly raised mound with a wreath of faded roses on it, and then carefully tied a handful of the earth in his handkerchief:

"I am not being sentimental.... You will understand later...."

Lancier was in a huff—why had they not taken him to the cemetery, but it soon passed off, he was overjoyed to see his son; Louis was alive, not even a prisoner of war. He had treated his son as if he were a small boy and would say: "Can nippers like that fight? .." And even now he listened to what he had to say with a condescending smile—what does he understand? ... What a stroke of luck that the boy managed to keep out of it! ...

In the evening he said:

"Well, so Louis is with us. How sad that poor Mama is not here.... It is very hard for me to bear, but we must think of the future...."

He was not seeking advice from his children, he was simply talking to himself aloud.

"Alpert must be in Paris by now, but it is hard to expect that he will be able to save Roche aîné, as far as the Germans are concerned he is not a Frenchman.... I am not enamoured of the prospect of going back to Paris, of course, but one must live. If I don't go back, the Germans may take the factory and Corbeille...."

Suddenly Louis interrupted him:

"What, do you intend to work for the Germans?"

Lancier took affront:

"Why speak in that tone? ... I am too shaken by Mama's death to put my mind to business affairs. It only just suddenly occurred to me.... And, perhaps, precisely because we have found you again. I have no right to leave Mado and you without means."

"I don't need anything," said Mado. "And I don't want to go back to Paris...."

And Louis said, raising his voice:

"You needn't worry about me. I am in the army...."

"But the army is being demobilized."

"I don't intend to obey a traitor."

"Whom are you referring to?"

"Pétain."

"Louis!"

"What? . . ."

"You are too young to judge the hero of Verdun. Besides, you are a Junior Lieutenant, how dare you talk like that about a Marshal? Where's the discipline you just talked about?"

"I had honest commanders in mind. But Pétain—is a traitor. I, a little lieutenant, have a right to tear the epaulets off his shoulders! I have been at the front. We could have held on. . . . And then. . . . We could have retreated to Algiers, to the Congo, anywhere! Anything would have been better than this disgrace!"

"You are talking in this way because you are twenty. Luckily, the fate of the country is not being decided by milksops! Can you understand a mother's feelings? . . ."

"That depends on the kind of mother. . . . Skunks also have mothers. . . . If Mama were alive she would understand why I talk like this. . . ."

"Do you want to say that I think differently from the way Mama thought? Perhaps you think I am dishonourable too?" Lancier no longer realized what he was saying. "It's easy to brandish weapons when an armistice has been signed. You yourself have said that you have not made a single combat flight. Who gave you the right to judge the Marshal? He was at Verdun. I was at Verdun too, I know what that means. . . . But you, a mere boy, throw stones. . . ."

He stopped talking and wiped his perspiring face. After a long pause Louis answered:

"What was the use of Verdun if Pétain is selling France a quarter of a century after? I didn't want to argue, but you are compelling me to. . . . You are worrying about whether you will be able to leave me Roche aîné. But tell me, have you thought about what you are going to leave us—France, or a German café chantant? You haven't thought about anything. And you brought us up in the same way—unthinking. . . . Now we have to start from the beginning. . . ."

Marceline used often to recall the proverb: Misfortune brings its brother. Several days later Mado said to her father:

"I saw Louis off yesterday."

"What do you mean 'saw him off'? Where's he gone off to?"

"I don't know. To fight, I suppose. . . ."

Lancier sat down and covered his face with his hands, and he sat like that until late at night. He cursed his son and yet admired him; but he thought more about himself than about his son, he pitied himself—his family had fallen to pieces, had collapsed, like France. . . . What was the use of living now, of engaging in dull business affairs, of trying to get to Paris, where rude and arrogant aliens were ruling the roost. . . .

Mado recalled her leave-taking with her brother, he was in a hurry and kept repeating: "Go! Go!" She embraced him.

"You are not blaming me, Mado, are you?"

"I envy you."

"Why? You can do the same..."

"No, I can't. I don't believe in anything, Louis. Do you understand? There's nothing in me. I suppose I was born that way. But I love you. I want you to be happy. I know I ought to say something else... I want you to be victorious..."

This was at night, in a dark street, and Louis did not see Mado's tears.

* 6 *

Sergei had travelled a great deal during the past months—he had been to Yaroslavl, Rostov, Gorky. He felt entirely in his element; laughing at himself he said to Nina Georgiyevna: "When I am at work nothing exists for me, it seems to me that the fate of mankind depends upon a single bridge." ...

But this was not true: gloomily, anxiously he watched developments in the West. Every morning he snatched up the newspaper—had the Germans been checked? ... One day there was a brief report on the fourth page: "The German forces have occupied Paris."

Mado! ... His heart shrank. He did not often think of Mado—his days were filled with blueprints, plans and figures. He knew now that the past would not repeat itself; he reproached himself—why did he not suppress this infatuation? He was to blame for Mado's tears. But perhaps she had forgotten him? Hadn't she said "this—outside of life"? ... But still, he was to blame... Only very rarely, in the middle of the night, did the vision of Mado rise before him; and at such moments he confessed to himself that he would never be able to love like that again; he had given her the greatest thing one could give—the passion of his heart, his dreams. But he did not remember those confessions in the morning—life took possession of its own.

Now it seemed as though the curtain had dropped. Amidst this clash of emotions, these spiritual complexities and disharmonies, he was conscious of only one thing: Mado was in great distress. She was in distress—as Paris was. ...

Germans in Paris! ... He tried to grasp the significance of what had happened, he could not. How many times had he said to Mado, and to his mother, that France, which was ruled by petty, dishonest men, torn asunder by internal strife, happy-go-lucky and defenceless, would collapse as soon as Hitler's well-armed forces moved against her. Nevertheless, he had never pictured such a débâcle. He had ex-

pected a struggle, a short one, perhaps, but a desperate and heroic one. The fact that Paris had fallen without firing a shot shocked him. He raved, as if the general who had dared to proclaim the city of four revolutions an open city was standing in front of him. The scoundrels, they let them in as if it were a hotel!

He thought of Lejean, of the young workingman he had spoken to at the Roche aîné factory, of the people of Billancourt, Suresnes and Ivry. They would not have surrendered. . . . But they were arrested, herded in concentration camps, persecuted. The skunks! They wanted France without Communists, France without the people. And they got—Germans in the Place de la Bastille.

Then he pondered over what his own life had been: over Moscow, over projects, over his mother, over Valya's nebulous smile (he often met her, evidently she attracted him in some way—there, he had just thought of her). he thought about the earth, the trees and flowers. It was still peaceful here, girls were still telling their fortunes with daisies as Mado had done, he was still thinking—whether Valya would ring him up today, mothers were still nursing their children, children were still learning their conjugations, houses were still being built, people were discussing where to put up a partition, what to cover the couch with, peace, blue, with light, feathery clouds, like a June day, was still reigning over this land. But over there. . . . How quickly they had crushed France! . . . Burning, looting, killing. . . . Sergei recalled what Anna had told him. That kind will also hurl themselves at us. . . . They have only to assimilate France. in two or three years' time they will certainly hurl themselves. . . .

At dinner Sergei had an argument with Belchev. Opening the newspaper Belchev smiled with satisfaction, and after chewing a piece of tough beef he said:

"They have given those French a good thrashing, haven't they? . . ."

This made Sergei angry. Belchev may not love Paris, that's his business, he has never been there, and besides, he doesn't read much. He is a good worker, but a man of limited outlook. But still! . . . Paris, even of the past, is—a volume of history, and of the history that is precious to us! And besides, the fascists' victory—is a menace, and such an easy victory too. It will turn their heads. . . . It is no longer an argument about whether Paris is good or not, it is—ours. . . . Everybody understands that. But Belchev did not want to understand:

"What are you getting excited about? It was a beautiful knockout. . . ."

Sergei was extremely annoyed at the complacency with which those last few words were uttered. And complacency was Belchev's distinguishing feature. Moreover, he made it a point of exhibiting this

complacency to everybody daily, even hourly: if anybody said to him: "The frost is fierce today," he would answer: "Frost is good for you, there's no dampness," but on a raw rainy day he would say with delight: "It's not a bit cold." ... And in saying that he would chuckle and stroke his cheek, or his big fleshy nose. He was true to form to-day—he smiled in the same way, and said in the same way: "What's there to get excited about?..."

Sergei persisted. Belchev then passed to the offensive: he accused Sergei of "lacking dialectics" and of being a "sniveller." Growing weary with the argument, he drank up the thick syrup of his compôte and said:

"Oh, to hell with them! ... I don't believe there's anybody with political intelligence there...."

"Have you forgotten about the Communists? Have you forgotten about the workers, about the people? ... What sort of a Bolshevik are you? ..."

"We have quite enough of our own affairs...."

Suddenly Pavel Sergeyevich Lukutin intervened. He never took part in discussions as a rule. He was regarded as a useful worker but politically undeveloped. He was shy and reticent, so that people who had worked with him for a number of years knew nothing about his private life. He was forty years old, but everything about him seemed old-fashioned—his manners and expressions. When Belchev said "we have quite enough of our own affairs" Pavel Sergeyevich, who seemed not to have been listening to the argument, said:

"Pardon me for interfering, but I must disagree with you. We are all busy with our own affairs, but I think you are wrong. I never imagined that we had... I can find no other word than isolationists... among us. Take this knife, an ordinary knife, home manufacture, as we say today. I venture to say that the manufacture of such a knife is a matter that concerns the whole of mankind. Some admire us because they expect salvation from us, but others hate us because we manufacture table knives, and not only that, because we exist. That's because it is impossible to separate our fate from the fate of the whole of mankind. If we are victorious, everybody will be victorious. I don't know whether I have succeeded in saying what I wanted to say. What I mean is, when the people of another country are wounded, we feel it—here. ..."

He pointed to his heart.

Belchev got up:

"I will not argue with you. You'd do better to read some literature before you start teaching others...."

In the evening Sergei went to see his mother, he knew that she had been grieved by the news. Nina Georgiyevna met him with the words:

"Seryozhenka, how is this? ..."

She put to him the question that he had put to himself that morning, the question which millions and millions had asked.

"Surrender Paris! ... But what about the people, the workers? ..."

"The workers are so strong that the bourgeoisie dare not fight Hitler in real earnest, but the workers are too weak to seize power. And the man in the street, the average Frenchman, understands absolutely nothing. For five years he had it dinned into his mind that it was better to have Hitler than the People's Front, he was told that the Communists would take his garden with the sweet peas, would prohibit the drinking of apero, and perhaps nationalize women. You can't imagine how easy it is to fool the average Frenchman. They regard themselves as sceptics, as old birds, but actually ... they are children, real children. ... Now they will see what fascism is. The last word has not yet been spoken. ..."

"I know that the people will triumph, I am only afraid that they will triumph when nothing is left. I am not talking about Notre-Dame, or the Louvre, I want the French people and their traditions, their refinement, their free and easy manners and their complexity to survive. We all need that. ... But if the fascists manage to hold on for twenty years. ... Look what has become of Germany. ... I feel, depressed, Seryozha."

Sergei said nothing, he again recalled Mado. And it seemed as though Nina Georgiyevna guessed his thoughts, so affectionately and awkwardly did she press his hand. This gesture was so unusual for his mother that Sergei was touched, he turned away.

For a long time they sat in silence. Then Nina Georgiyevna said:

"A student at my Institute said today: 'They have taken Paris, but we have the banner of the Commune—it is in the Mausoleum.' ..."

"That's the best answer that can be given to Belchev! Do you know who will save Paris, Mama? Our men! ... I am convinced of that. I was walking along the Kalayevskaya today—some Red Army men came marching from the opposite direction, they were going to the bathhouse, and singing. ... They are—our hope! ... The eyes of the whole world are now turned towards them! ..."

He smiled and said pensively, in a different tone of voice: "If there was such a magic telegraph—straight from heart to heart—I would send a telegram to Paris describing how those Red Army men were marching down the Kalayevskaya and singing. ..."

Jestingly, but gently, Nina Georgiyevna asked:

"To a girl?"

He shook his head.

"No. ... To a lad who works at Roche aîné."

When he returned to his lodgings that night he thought of Valya and exclaimed to himself: There will be war! If not now, then in a few years' time. . . . Sergei vaguely recalled how he had played at "Perekop" with his playmates; brought up during years of peace, he did not realize that in the interval between two air raids men blow the finest glass, build houses, and plant roses. If he were told that night that it is possible to kiss a girl an hour before going into battle, he would not have believed it.

In the morning the peaceful blue sky was streaked with light feathery clouds. Sergei thought of the impending storm more often than many others of his age—he had been in the other camp, and the fascists were not merely newspaper words to him; but while he thought about war he could not sense it. Triumphantly he said to Grigoryev: "Do you see—it is not a utopia at all. We shall have it all arranged ahead of time." . . . In the evening he telephoned Valya.

* 7 *

September was a dreary, rainy month; but one day turned out to be fine. There is great charm in the Russian autumn; it seems as though, in anticipation of the long winter, the trees which still retain some remnants of their finery, and the sun which is still warm, are trying to console and raise our spirits and say—the spring will again clothe the gardens in verdure and the sun will burst through the double window frames.

Pavel Sergeyevich Lukutin telephoned his wife to say that he would not be home to dinner. As he stepped into the street and set eyes on Alexandrovsky Park, all in gold, and on the warm, pink walls of the Kremlin, he smiled confidently.

Lukutin's life had been complicated not by external events, but by his own intellectual leanings. His father, a professor of botany, had imbibed the ideas of the past century and had divided his sympathies between Tolstoy's advocacy of non-resistance to evil and dreams of a liberal Constitution. He rejoiced when the revolution came but was soon disappointed with it: "Blood again! . . ." His health broke down, he rarely left his house, and read Plato. When a friend asked him: "Are you sabotaging?" the professor roared: "No, brother, I am not sabotaging, I am burning with indignation." . . . Shortly afterwards he died.

Pavel Sergeyevich seemed to have taken upon himself the task of continuing the debate with history which his father had started. As a boy he had written in his exercise book: "Against the Stream." He was interested in literature, the romanticists, read Byron and Lenau in the original, but decided to study the art of building, for he said to himself

that the people were always right and it was one's duty to serve the people. After graduating from the Institute he worked in Kazan, Berezniki and Kuznetsk, and for the past few years had been working in Moscow. He was satisfied with his work, but he was often tormented by doubt about the justness of the cause to which he was devoting his life, his soul. He was outraged by the coarse manners, the heartlessness of this or that official. But he would argue with himself: This is because we are—pioneers, in twenty years' time people will be different.... But sometimes he would think in despair: You can't remould that kind.... Like his father, he was enraged by every act of injustice, but his character differed from his father's: although he had been taken up with Tolstoyanism, the professor had been fond of a scrap, but Pavel Sergeyevich was reticent, and never lost his equanimity. He would laugh at himself and say: a nice fellow you are, you protest within four walls. This was not due to cowardice, he was bound by his inner duality—due perhaps to the way he was brought up, perhaps it was the lot of certain exceedingly reticent natures.

Who knows how much he had turned over in his mind during the past twenty years—in hostels, in hutments, in the Russian long-distance trains which seem to have been built deliberately for the purpose of reflection! He merged with his times slowly, painfully, trusting neither the people around him nor himself. He was regarded as being indifferent towards public life, but this was wrong, he not only read much, but tried to link what he read with what he saw, and did not separate his work from thoughts about the development of culture. Fascism had shocked him: if he had long had doubts about the nature of good, he recognized evil at once, and his hatred of evil enabled him rid himself of many contradictions; he wavered less often, thought more confidently of the future—he knew that a duel lay ahead that would decide a great deal.

Several times in the course of his life he fell in love, but his innate shyness had prevented him from confessing his sentiments. He married late; it can scarcely be said that he married—Katya decided everything. She was a girl with heavenly eyes (at least that is what Lukutin had thought), but she was exceedingly practical and called sentiment "piffle." She did not want to go to the provinces. Lukutin had a good job then. Noticing that he always blushed when he spoke to her, Katya invited him to her room and sent her friend away. A week later she said in a matter-of-fact way: "We can go and register now."... She gave birth to a daughter, and she made the room look more habitable. Lukutin accepted her as one of the inevitable misfortunes of life: she insisted that he should earn more, and bored him to death with her gossip, or her talk about the commission stores.

He was glad he was not going home; he decided to have a bite

in a café. He chose a table near the window and gazed long at the autumn sunset; he did not notice a tall man in a checked sport suit approach the table. Lukutin looked up in surprise—light, slightly bewildered eyes, thin wavy hair. . . . He looks familiar, but where have I seen him—I don't remember. . . . The newcomer addressed him in German:

"Don't you recognize me? I recognized you at once. Surely you remember—Kuznetsk, July, nineteen thirty-two. . . ."

Eight years ago a group of Germans had come to Kuznetsk; among them was a young Berlin architect named Kurt Richter. He was conspicuous for his poetical appearance as well as for his expansiveness, he went into raptures over absolutely everything—the foundation ditches, the daring plans of the engineers, the taiga and the picturesque dress of the Kazakhs; again and again he would exclaim: "Kolossal!" After neat, accurate and dull Germany, everything seemed to him fabulous. I am becoming a Communist, he said to himself.

He spent a week in Kuznetsk and there made the acquaintance of Lukutin, who knew German well. Much against his will, Pavel Sergeyevich was obliged to act as his guide; it bored him utterly. When Richter pointed to a dugout, Lukutin began to explain to him: "Not long ago there was not a living soul here." . . . But without listening to him the German would exclaim: "Kolossal! How picturesque! . . ." Having decided to join the Communists, Richter asked Pavel Sergeyevich: "Have you been a member of the Party long? . . ." Lukutin blushed as if he had been caught in a crime and answered: "I am non-Party."

That had been so long ago, and they had gone through so much since then, that it was surprising that Richter should recognize Lukutin and that Pavel Sergeyevich should remember their meeting.

Richter had changed little, perhaps he had become a little more restrained. Looking at the Russian he recalled his own youth, his enthusiasms and illusions. And Lukutin wondered what had brought Richter to Moscow; was he one of those poor wretches who roamed round the world, or a fascist in a high position? . . .

Richter did not become a Communist in nineteen thirty-two. On returning home he decided to keep out of politics. Were there not many other passions that one could give way to? He met Hilde. She was a little girl with a head of crinkled hair like that of a white Negress. Richter lost his head; he sought Hilde's hand for two years, was jealous of every man who came near her, even of the old English teacher. When, at last, he won her, and they got married, his torments increased: he thought that Hilde did not love him and that she was unfaithful to him; in thought if not in deed. At night he was afraid to fall asleep—several times he had heard his wife mumbling something in her sleep; he waited to hear her name some unknown rival. Hilde seemed to be one of the

quiet ones; but gazing into her childish and yet enigmatic, catlike eyes, he realized that this woman's heart was like the still waters. . . .

What did he want with politics? He earned good money, went to the theatre with Hilde, and was interested in psychoanalysis. But politics came knocking at his door uninvited. The Nazis came into power. Richter was of the opinion that while the "new order" may be beneficial for Germany—who could tell?—it was restrictive for cultured Germans. Like many weak-willed people, he regarded himself as a man of strong character and, repeating what others said, thought he was expressing his own cherished thoughts. His friends related to him in whispers comic stories in which the heads of the Third Reich were ridiculed. Hilde would say: "I'm afraid to go out of the house. . . . Yesterday some Storm Troopers were dragging a young woman along the street. People said she had been living with a Jew. . . . They spat in her face. It's disgusting! Whose business is it with whom she lived? . . . The government can't go searching people's beds! . . . And what about the children? . . . Have you seen what they are doing? They are compelling little children to march like soldiers! No good will come of that! . . ." Richter thought to himself: She sympathizes with that woman because she wants to be unfaithful to me, with anybody, even with a Jew! . . . Nevertheless, he realized that Hilde was right—how could Storm Troopers govern the country? . . .

When, however, Hitler annexed Austria, Richter said: "You can say what you like, but that man has the nose of a genius! . . . Think of it, to achieve Germany's age-long dream without shedding a drop of blood! . . ." Hilde did not argue with him. Several years ago she had been to Vienna with her father and she had been charmed by the gracefulness of that ancient city, by the Ring, and by the elegance of the women. To get Vienna without war! Perhaps those urchins who bawled outside her window were right? . . . Only Vienna would now become coarse, like Berlin. . . .

Vienna was followed by Prague. Richter thought it was time to stop, he recalled the stories his father had told him about nineteen hundred and eighteen. Suppose the Führer suddenly loses his nerve? . . . Richter was afraid of war—he was afraid of defeat, and he was also afraid of having to go and fight. It must be awful—to be in a trench and wait for a shell to blow you to pieces! . . . And what about Hilde? . . . How could he leave Hilde? . . . Six years of cohabitation, the petty things of life, dinners, household bills, medicines, the warm and cosy apartment—all this had failed to cure Richter of his frightful jealousy. He was afraid to go to Bremen for two or three days, came home from his office at all times of the day, and forced himself to listen to symphonic music so that Hilde should not go to a concert without him. He was convinced that his wife, who had grown from a gawky girl into a handsome woman, was only waiting for the opportunity to make up for lost time.

The war started. He was given temporary exemption, but all the winter he was tormented by the thought: my turn will come soon. . . . His father had once told him about the effectiveness of the French artillery, and about the bayonet charges of the Sengalese. Would he have to go through all that? . . . And suddenly France fell. Richter together with all the rest shouted until he was hoarse: "Sieg Heil!" But for all that, something gnawed within him. . . . Suppose it all suddenly ends in disaster? Nobody knew what America had in mind. And what about Russia? . . . What will Russia say? The main thing was that nobody could tell when the Führer would stop, and whether he would stop at all. . . .

After a conversation with a Nazi friend (everything was mixed up now) Richter began to believe that Germany had been entrusted with the lofty mission of—organizing Europe. He reread Nietzsche—and it seemed to him that he could become strong, lone and proud. Suddenly he banged his fist on the table and exclaimed: "We Germans must live restlessly! . . ." Hilde was startled. She looked at him in amazement with her round, catlike eyes and answered: "What I long for most is peace and quiet. Who wants these conquests? . . . You may be sent off to the front any minute. . . ." And Richter thought to himself. "She's right. Life must not be turned into a gamble! Life was easiest under the Kaisers, one could be liberal-minded, they built comfortable houses, and the strength was real. . . . They sneaked Paris like an apple from a stall, but they will have to answer for it—in a year's time, or in ten years' time. . . ."

Hilde's brother came back from France and brought her perfumes, stockings and chocolates; she was as happy as a little girl at a Christmas tree; but on hearing that her brother was being sent to conquer England she burst into tears, the chocolate melted in her hand. But her brother said: "Don't worry! We'll mop them up in three or four months. All we've got to do is get across, and there. . . . Nothing can stand up against our tanks." These words staggered Richter. The Führer may have made mistakes, but he was head and shoulders above all the rest. It is a pity, of course, to smash up ancient cities like Rouen, but nothing can be achieved without sacrifice, and now a new Europe is being born.

At night Hilde said to him: "You may be sent to England. . . ." He answered: "I know. It's awful, we have been struck by a squall, human beings don't count. . . . Only promise me that you will wait. . . ."

When the firm for which Richter was working informed him that he would have to go to Moscow for three weeks, he was overjoyed—he tenderly recalled that land of miracles. But how could he leave Hilde? He demanded that she should take a vow of fidelity, he wore her out.

She said: "You have gone crazy. At a time like this! . . ." He answered: "Just because it's a time like this."

Before his departure Colonel Wilke summoned him and said that Russia—was a sphynx, and it would be a good thing if Richter tried to solve the Russian riddle. Richter had already been in Moscow and would no doubt meet some of his old acquaintances, it would be interesting to find out how the Russians looked upon the Bolsheviks, whether they were aware of the advantages of the German new order, and what the prospects were for "peaceful or semi-peaceful penetration"—as he expressed it. Richter kept this interview from Hilde, all he said was: "It used to be a much pleasanter trip before! I don't feel free now. . . ." After a brief pause he added: "I have never toadied to them, as you know. Perhaps that is why they trust me. . . ."

As he approached Lukutin's table Richter was not thinking of the instructions he had received from the Colonel; he was moved, recalled old times, talked freely and cracked jokes. How ardent and naive he had been in his youth! In Kuznetsk he had told this Russian that he had wanted to become a Communist. And Lukutin had confessed to him then that he was—non-Party. . . . And suddenly an idea flashed through Richter's mind: That's the man who can help me! Fate had come to his aid, he would hear the opinion of the Russian opposition, he would put one over on the journalists and the hired informers.

Wishing to get into Lukutin's good graces, Richter began by saying that he had doubted whether the Nazis would triumph. He allowed himself to be carried away and for a moment forgot about his intention to nose out information.

"It is not easy in our country for a man who is accustomed to think independently, everything is served up ready made—truth, line of conduct, even fantasies. For a long time I did not believe them and criticized absolutely everything. But now. . . . One must have the courage to admit one's mistakes. I will not say that I was always wrong, but I went too far. Many people in our country laughed when Goering said that guns were better than butter. But if we have bread and butter now, it's because the guns helped us to get it. Germany was hard done by in Versailles, you know that yourself. . . . A wretched little country like Holland lived a hundred times better than we did. Now a historical injustice is being removed. But I must admit that there are certain details I don't like. . . . The Jews, of course, are a sore, but as for what is going on in Poland. . . . Perhaps I am a bit conservative, but I can't stomach that. But after all, this is—a detail. A new Europe is being born. You can't imagine how glad I am that we are not at war with you. Our ideologies may be different, but we have a common enemy. You too do not cling to the past. But you have much. . . . Please don't be offended, I'm saying this because I respect you. . . . I know that you too think inde-

pendently. But you have much that is out-of-date. . . . Take internationalism, for instance. . . ."

He pulled himself up: I'm doing all the talking. I won't learn anything that way. . . .

"Why don't you say something, Herr Lukutin?"

"I'm listening to you. This is the first time I have met a real live fascist. It's interesting. . . ."

"I, a fascist? The Italians are fascists, and by the way, they are despised in our country. If you think I am a Nazi—you are mistaken. I disagree with them on quite a number of points. You can speak quite frankly with me, I am no wooden-headed Storm Trooper. What do you think about the rapprochement between us?"

"Foreign politics—are a complicated business. As regards fascism. . . . Excuse me, but I am accustomed to that term. . . . As regards fascism, I hate it. It must be cauterized, otherwise everything will perish. . . . Excuse me, I am in a hurry."

He paid his bill and without offering to shake hands with Richter he went out.

"Perhaps I talked too sharply? But, then, I am not a diplomat. . . . A nice one! And yet tries to put on airs. . . . We shall have to fight them, and it will be a terrific fight—Hitler has drilled them. Formerly a fellow like Richter used to think, but now he has rid himself of all that—of thoughts, of conscience, and even of common decency. Land of philosophers, indeed! . . ."

He walked down Gorky Street. The tall houses stood out clearly against the evening sky; he didn't like those houses, but just now he was conscious of a feeling of tenderness towards them, as if an assassin with the eyes of an absent-minded dreamer had raised his hand against them. We must live, Lukutin said to himself, if only in order to prevent the Richters from coming here. . . .

He met Sergei at the meeting and recalled the dispute with Belchev. He wanted to tell Sergei about his encounter in the café, but refrained, only, on taking leave of Sergei, he tightly gripped his hand—and he felt towards him too that tenderness he had felt towards the houses, the city, the new factory building plans, towards this stern, serene and for all that ardent, confused, passionate life.

* 8 *

Shortly after his conversation with Lukutin, Richter left Moscow. On setting eyes on Hilde he was amazed: how beautiful that woman can become! He stared hard at her and said with affected jauntiness:

"There's lots of nice girls in Moscow."

She answered dispassionately:

"Yes? ..."

He thought to himself: her heart's set on somebody else.... He would never know what was going on in that woman's heart!

Hilde then asked him what he had seen in Moscow.

"The city has changed a great deal, they have put up a lot of new buildings. They are shabbily dressed, but there's plenty to eat. I ate as many as five pastries at a time. And the people are fairly cheerful. The most frightful thing about it is the vastness, it's far enough to Moscow, but I remember travelling to Siberia.... And how many people! The streets teem with them.... You know, Hilde, after all, it gives you an uncomfortable feeling to think that that exists.... The Führer knows best, of course, but from the human point of view it would be better to rely on the West. After all, Paris or London cannot be colonized, even those snotty-nosed boys in the Hitler Jugend understand that. But Russia--- is a vacant space. I met an acquaintance there, not a Communist, an educated man who speaks German well. But the way he talked.... That was the way our Communists talked up to nineteen thirty-three. The Russians---are not bad people, but they need leadership, we must give them not only Field Marshals of thought---rulers and scientists, but also spiritual sergeants---schoolteachers, feldshers, and even traffic cops---they simply don't know how to cross the street.... It is a colossal task, but unless it is carried out the new Europe will be impossible."

"I don't understand, Kurt. Do you mean to say we are going to fight the Russians? That's madness! How long can we go on fighting?"

"There may not be war in the ordinary sense of the word. A good authority told me that there will be peaceful or semi-peaceful penetration. I don't quite know what he meant by that.... Probably the Russians will surrender even more quickly than the French. In my opinion, the difficulties will arise later---in assimilating such a country.... I told you about that acquaintance of mine from Kuznetsk. Perhaps he was pretending to be an irreconcilable because he was afraid of the GPU, but when we get the upper hand he will come over to us.... I don't know. At all events, we are on the threshold of historic events, it's in the air...."

He went out for a stroll. Berlin charmed him with its precision: long, straight streets and uniform houses. He thought to himself: this absence of fantasy is the most beautiful fantasy.

In the Tiergarten children were playing. The statues basked in the sunshine of the last warm days. Old men leisurely smoked pale cigars. There were lots of soldiers about; and from the masterful way in which they hugged the girls one could see that they were---conquerors.

Richter listened to the conversation.

"Franz writes that in their unit everything is ready for a landing...."

"In Wilmersdorf, five rooms and a big bathroom..."

"They'll be selling Dutch cheese on Monday, real Dutch, you know—from over there..."

"Schmidt says that it will all be over by the first of May..."

Richter rejoiced: what calmness! Just now the Londoners were shivering and wondering where to hide—in the Underground, or in a slit? But here—confidence, consciousness of one's strength. If Lukutin could be brought into this garden, to these statues, to these children, he would understand that his muzhiks could never stand up against such organization. It was pleasant to take a trip to Russia, but one couldn't live there. Robert had put it very aptly when he said that it was—"Arctic Africa"... Why had Robert visited Hilde twice?... He could have waited with those blueprints... Perhaps it is he who has stolen Hilde's heart? She is a crazy woman... Richter suddenly took a mental look at himself and laughed: Othello!... But what could he do, it was his nature. He was restrained in public, but Hilde knew what a fury he was. That's the secret of the German character—eternal dynamics. The French are fond of debate, the English are businessmen, the Russians are dreamers of fantastic dreams, but we tear along, we—are motion. The Führer understood the essence of the German character, he gave us a goal, and now we are combining spiritual dynamite with splendid organization. Why was I so afraid of the storm? I even frightened Hilde... Let others fear the storm, we have nothing to be afraid of—we are the storm,

* 9 *

When the curtain has dropped in the theatre, when the heroine's sufferings are over and the hero has triumphed, when the actors have stopped coming to the footlights in answer to the last feeble applause, and when the people crowding in the cloakrooms are talking about their everyday affairs, a girl may be seen in the deserted auditorium with eyes still unseeing, still living through the exhausted passions of the tragedy. Is not this the same girl who, in the picture gallery, stands gazing at an old portrait, in no way remarkable, trying to guess the riddle of life that has long passed away? And is it not the one who, when her friends are gaily chattering about Zhenya or Masha, suddenly begins to move her lips silently and recite to herself:

*Love, love, tradition tells us,
Is a union of kindred souls,
Their amalgamation, combination,
Their fatal coalescence,
And fatal duel...*

Such was Valya. She had dreamed of becoming an actress but it turned out that she lacked talent, all she possessed was that highstrung nature that compels one to live for art. One day the old regisseur spoke to her; he had a tender feeling for this pathetic but, as he thought, foolish girl: "Choose another profession. What do you want the movies for? . . . It's an art for spectators, and for another hundred or two of the elite. For you it will be simply hard work. All day long you will either freeze or perspire, and then they will take you in a crowd and nobody will notice you. If you are lucky, you may be given a part—in ten years' time—you will show a young pig to the chairman of the District Soviet and say significantly: 'We're sending him to Moscow. To the Exhibition. . . .' And that's all. . . . What do you want that for? You'll spoil your eyes, and you'll spoil yourself. . . ." Valya grieved on hearing those words, but she did not give up her dream: she was willing to serve her Muse even as a scullery maid.

She was twenty-six years old, but her life remained misty, like the dawn. Ready to run all over the town to help a friend, she was incapable of doing anything for herself, it was not for nothing that her mother said that she was "sleepy." Looking at Valya, Dr. Krylov could not suppress his amazement: at one moment the girl looked plain, at another she looked charming, at one moment she was vivacious and gay, at another her thoughts seemed to be far away.

Valya had spent the summer in Kiev; she had been delighted at the prospect of seeing her friends of the Pickwick Club—her loneliness had wearied her. Her mother simply stuffed her with food. Her father enquired hesitatingly: "What do they say in Moscow—will you be anything? . . ." Valya made no reply.

She did not recognize Raya—she was capricious, absent-minded and distrustful. Osip was still in Pechora, and Raya said to Valya: "He's forgotten me, that's clear. . . . I am not waiting for him any more." Zina she could not find: she had left her room and nobody knew where she had gone. Galochka came to visit Valya every evening and questioned her about Moscow, about the Red Square, about the theatres. But Valya, like everybody else, treated Galochka with condescension: the laughing girl.

A day or two after she arrived in Kiev Valya went to see Borya. The door was opened by Vera Platonovna:

"He is not at home, my dear, he was sent on a job. City of Tarnopol. . . ."

She dried her eyes with her apron and then said fussily:

"Sit down! Why, you've become quite a Moscovite. . . . Are you getting on all right there? . . ."

And Valya broke down—she burst into tears. She confided to Vera Platonovna what she could not tell her mother:

"I've no talent. I'll not be anything. . . ."

"Why do you say that? 'Not be anything.' . . . You'll be somebody. Nothing is achieved without suffering. Wait, we'll have tea, and you'll tell me everything. . . ."

Before returning to Moscow Valya went for a row on the river. Her heart gave a leap—the banks were white, green and gold, her girlhood and its dreams rose before her. Perhaps I'd better stay here? . . . Raya and Galochka are here, and Borya will come back. . . . She could pour out her heart to Vera Platonovna. . . . And the main thing—this was Kiev! Whoever grew up here could not find happiness in another city. . . . But that was a momentary weakness: in Moscow there is the Institute, art. And Valya returned to Moscow.

She became attached to Sergei passionately, to the point of self-oblivion; after the second or third meeting she knew that she loved him. Up to that time she had banished the phantom of love, the men who had attempted to woo her seemed to her to be petty and banal. She had feared fleeting tendernesses as some people fear to sip a glass of wine—suppose I lose my head? Better remain alone. And besides—was that love? . . . Such people cannot feel deeply, to them love was—amusement. What was it, then, that drew her to Sergei? He was neither an actor nor a poet. Perhaps the mild grey eyes and dark face, his impulsive gestures? . . . Or perhaps the inspiration with which he talked about things which formerly had seemed dull to Valya? Or perhaps it just happened—at last love came? . . . Meetings with Sergei filled her life; now, on waking up, she knew what the day was for, the numbers on the street cars spoke to her, the hands of a clock drove her out of her mind.

Spring came; and on a windy sunny day Moscow came to life; water dripped from the eaves everywhere, babbling streams flowed down the side-streets, the roofs were being cleared of snow; people at once quickened their footsteps on the sidewalks; people laughed loudly. Flower sellers sold mimoza, no longer shrivelled and dry, but happy and beaming, and happy and beaming were Valya's eyes when she came to Sergei. It was already dusk, and the dusk filled the room and transformed everything, turned the wardrobe into a tree and the carpet into a meadow; it powdered student-girl Valya's face, ruffled her hair and put belladonna into her eyes, and she gazed at Sergei with the wide open eyes of fate.

Anxiety and joy filled her heart.

"I won't be anything. I wanted to be an actress. . . . But there's lots of things one wants! . . . One must be born different for that."

"One must live intensely—live a hundred, even more, lives in one. . . ."

"Lermontov died when he was quite young. . . . When did he mar-

age it all? Perhaps in his case it was not feeling, but premonition? ..."

"It's an awful state when you have a premonition.... Do you know what, Valya...."

"No, I don't know! But don't tell me! ..."

"Moscow today is like the sea before a storm."

"I've never seen the sea.... But what you say is true.... Seryozha! ..."

She gave herself to him, her as yet inexperienced lips, the hidden passion that long remains buried, remains silent, but when it breaks out—displays such strength, such weight, that the eyes grow dim and one gasps for breath. At once Valya became a woman, as in a fairy tale, wise in every motion of her body, capricious and obedient, tender and passionate, no longer the Valya who shyly wondered whether she ought to go to Sergei—but an experienced and understanding Valya. She felt that Sergei had many years behind him, former infatuations, masculine inconstancy, thoughts about other things—perhaps about Paris, or about bridges, or about stars, anything but her. He was by her side, he was still breathing convulsively, had not yet got back into his rhythm, he still belonged to her, ruffled, hot and relaxed—such a one will not leave the house, will not even talk; but the hands, there were the hands of the clock! There, I am going out of my mind, like Raya! No, I must not think, make plans, or investigate!

And again Valya embraced Sergei, sought and found his lips. When he put on the light he was amazed—he had never seen her like that, her face had become beautiful with happiness. Sometimes the water of a deep river is exceptionally translucent and a man in a boat, looking over the gunwale, can see the bottom; in the same way, in moments of great and complete happiness, it is possible to see the soul of one's beloved. But Valya, coming to herself, screamed:

"You've gone mad! Put the light out!"

Life moved in intricate ways in moments of intense emotion. Why had a strange shadow stolen into that dark room? The leaves of an avenue, the grey ruffle on a distant river, the smell of roses and of petrol, a studio littered with canvases.... Sergei remembered everything; still hot from embraces, he was overcome by doubts, reproached himself for being frivolous. He did not say anything, but Valya's nerves were so exposed that she felt that he was departing from her, she asked no questions, however, did not cast reproaches, or plead.

"You don't love me, not one little bit. But it's all the same.... I'm so happy, so happy...."

Her kisses smacked of the salt of tears.

The living one conquered: now, when Valya thought that Sergei

was far away. he was with her, vanquished, devoted to her, and kissing her frail hands he said:

"You are wrong! I do love you! I fell in love with you at first sight. . . . In the autumn, when I met you at Natasha's. . . ."

"Dmitri Alexeyevich told my fortune then. He told me about you. . . . Seryozha, I'm so happy that I feel ashamed! Don't look at me. I beg of you, I be-e-g of y-o-u! . . ."

And she laughed. She began to talk about the summer—they would go to the seaside together, of course to the seaside, she had never seen the sea! . . . She recalled what Sergei had said about the storm, and again alarm filled her breast.

"We will never part. will we. Seryozha?"

"No."

"Is that true?"

"Why, of course."

"And there will be no war?"

"No."

He had answered sincerely. Why? He had answered Mado differently, he knew that war was unavoidable. But just now he believed that everything would work out right somehow—so much did he want happiness, not dreams, not Paris that resembled a phantom, not Mado who roamed through the avenues of the Bois de Boulogne amidst the gold and ashes, no, he wanted ordinary happiness, warm, his own, like a garden in the morning, like childhood. Glancing at Valya's rumpled dress he vaguely thought to himself—cotton-print happiness. . . . He could not picture war—it was senseless, a frightful word whirling about in the ether. . . . But Valya's cheeks, her breasts, her hands—that was happiness.

They went out together. It was a cold evening, the wind tore through Moscow, it blew so suddenly, in gusts, with such fury, as though it wanted to overturn the trees and blow out the street-lamps. Sergei remembered—the storm. . . . And a new feeling overcame him: pity, pity for peaceful everyday life, for the warm patches of light that still came from some windows, and above all for Valya, who was trustfully holding his arm. He must shield her, protect her from violence, save her! . . .

* 10 *

Maurice Lancier had changed a great deal, he now walked with a slight stoop and was getting bald. When anybody enquired about his health he answered: "Still carrying on, thank you." . . . He debated with himself a long time whether to return to Paris or not. He disliked the Germans and was pained at the thought of living in his old age under

an alien rule, and the rule of coarse people at that. But the idleness which he had prized so much in his happier days now bored him—from morning till night he thought of Marceline.

Berty came from Paris and related that the Germans were behaving courteously and that life was gradually getting back into its old groove. Berty had succeeded in saving Corbeille from requisition. There were difficulties with Roche aîné, the Germans were causing trouble over Alpert's origin. But if Lancier went to Paris, he would be able to dispel all misunderstanding.

Lancier was overjoyed: fate had relieved him of the necessity of making the choice. He said to Mado:

"Nothing can be done about it—Berty will take us to Paris."

About a hundred paces from Corbeille Lancier saw a German notice "Casino for Officers" and he heaved a deep sigh: "Mama died in time." . . . Perhaps it would be better to abandon everything and go to Lyons, or Marseilles? At least, there are no Germans there. . . . But he recalled the towns overcrowded with refugees, the filthy hotels, and the long days with nothing to do. Why senselessly play the frondeur? It was useless. Even the hero of Verdun went to Montoire to reach agreement with Hitler. It can't be helped—we have lost the war. The Germans are not fighting us now, they are fighting the English. We have nothing to do with it. . . . In what way are the English better than the Germans? They wanted to sink our fleet. . . . Messieurs the émigrés are protecting, not us, but their new masters. My factory will provide employment for Frenchmen. No, Messieurs, the French workers do not understand your calls for sabotage! What you are most concerned with are politics, politics again, eternal politics. But the workingman has children, and they have to be fed. . . . While uttering these philippics to himself Lancier thought of Louis. He is only a boy, where has he gone? He was guided by noble motives—had filled his mind with poetry. Romance. . . . One can be proud of a son like that. . . . But what does he know about politics? Others deliver speeches, receive decorations and earn money, but the boy will be killed. . . . A foolish and criminal gamble! Obviously, the Germans will triumph. The fate of France cannot be tied to the ruins of London.

On returning from the Kommandatur Lancier said to his daughter:

"Of course, I would much prefer to see them clear out of here. but to do them justice—they are courteous and understand our affairs perfectly. As soon as I mentioned my name they began to talk about Roche aîné. They promise to help. . . . A pity we did not have such energetic and live men."

Lancier started work. He spent his evenings rearranging his snuff boxes or books, sometimes he invited his friends home. He wanted to revive his former life, but everything had a bitter aftertaste. It seemed

to him that his workingmen gave him scowling looks; one of them happened to say: "So we are serving Hitler." . . . Lancier flared up: "You've been reading leaflets. What do I care about politics? I am serving France." The workingman smiled: "Yes, I was only joking." . . . But that pained Lancier more than anything: they are afraid, distrustful. . . . At Corbeille, every petty thing reminded him of Marceline. Nor did Lancier derive any pleasure from his friends—they all talked listlessly, reluctantly. On rare occasions somebody would ask whether the Germans would land in England soon, and as people were very cautious, even in private company, one could not tell whether the questioner was dreaming of Germany's victory or whether he wanted her to be defeated. "Paul Valéry's poems are beautiful, but rather cold," said Lancier; nobody objected; the conversation soon slipped into other, more mundane, subjects—about relations who were sending excellent butter from Normandy, about a certain Tonny who was capable of digging up a kilo of real coffee. Neither miniatures nor faded photographs could enliven Lancier; he would suddenly put some favourite knickknack aside and give a prolonged yawn. How dull! . . . And yet I lived for these things before. . . .

The Sudan goat, the pride of Corbeille, was eaten. Lancier wanted to convert this mournful event into a festival, he gathered his old friends and prepared a super-piquant sauce capable of giving the old goat the taste of the tenderest mutton. Sembat, Nivelles, Dr. Morillot and Dumas came. On seeing the professor, Lancier was overjoyed—Dumas had become a hermit, he would say: "I don't go out of the house—all the streets stink of them." . . . Léo did not come, although Lancier had invited him. When anybody talked about his former partner in his presence, Lancier would exclaim: "It's awful! . . ." Why should Léo be made to suffer? The Germans are sensible people, their science is up-to-date, but on this point they are mad. . . . Why have they picked on the Jews of all people? No, it's better not to think about it. But Dumas enquired, as if deliberately:

"Is Alpert coming?"

"You can be sure I invited him. But he prefers seclusion."

"And he's right," growled Dumas. "He sees fewer skunks."

Nivelles, wishing to clear the atmosphere, said something about the greatness of anchorites. Silently they consumed the Sudan goat. Lancier tried to start a conversation about music. Nivelles answered: "As regards Wagner." . . . Dumas got up, knocked the ashes out of his pipe on to the carpet and said:

"We have eaten, we have talked, and now—home. . . . Do you know what, Maurice, all this sounds like a parody. . . ."

The whole city was living this parody of life. The newspapers came out under their old titles—*Paris Soir*, *Petit Parisien*, *Matin*, and well-known signatures flashed across their pages. Only recently these newspa-

pers had denounced the Germans, now they were glorifying Hitler. Nobody was surprised at this. And nobody was surprised any longer at the elegant Parisiennes who strolled through the Champs-Élysées arm in arm with German officers. People worked for the Germans, sold to the Germans, bought from the Germans. Actors coming to the footlights in answer to applause turned to the box where a German general was sitting. Schirke, who had returned to Paris as a conqueror, said discreetly: "We don't want to force anything upon anybody, we will inspire." . . . In high society salons people began to talk about race purity, about returning to healthy rural life, denounced free thought which had been the ruin of France, spoke in praise of an ecclesiastical hierarchy and of stern upbringing. Theatres, ateliers de modes, banks and maisons de tolérance were open; but the will that lends the separate contraction of the muscles the unity of life was lacking. The imitation did not deceive anybody. The intricate coiffures were intended as substitutes for new dresses, but the beauties with the fashionable hair dress looked mournful—their faces betrayed sadness, privation and fear. Conversation about theatrical first nights or about art exhibitions would be interrupted by the exclamation:

"Roger got a litre of salad oil! . . ."

The Germans tried to be refined, offered their seats to ladies in the Metro and said "s'il vous plaît." "pardon." "merci." Arrests were made only at night; and at night people listened for the sound of automobile horns and for footsteps on the stairs.

Writers whose books adorned the bookshop windows expressed indignation at the French women who had become mistresses of Germans. And prostitutes turned away in disgust when they walked past those bookshops. Somewhere, underground, courageous people gathered, printed on homemade rotaries tiny leaflets, which called for a struggle, for feats of heroism, for sacrifice; but they were few, and their humane words were drowned by the whispering, muttering, laughter and tramping feet. People despised each other, and self-contempt gnawed at the heart of Paris worse than hunger.

Lancier at last made up his mind to talk to Léo about dissolving their partnership. Berty had saved Roche aîné. If times were different, Lancier could have compensated his partner. Now it was too difficult. . . . Lancier said to himself: it is caddish of me, of course, but I cannot help it. . . . Why should I rob Mado for Léo's sake? . . .

Lancier had not visited his friend for a long time. Léo was no doubt gloomier than the night. . . . It will be like attending a funeral. . . . But Léo welcomed him with the cheerful exclamation:

"Why, you've gone bald! Do you know what you look like now? A Roman senator."

Léontine was pale and thin, she could not recover from the shock caused by the death of her child. But Léo was not despondent—he was always fret-sawing, watering flowers, whistling. Lancier started with

something remote from the subject—about the madness of the orders issued by the Germans. Friendship has its rights.... But one has to live.... Mado.... Léo interrupted him:

"You can stow all that, Maurice, I'm not a child. I didn't expect anything, and don't claim anything...."

Lancier was overjoyed—the worst was over. Now before him stood his old friend, they could talk heart to heart. It would be interesting to know what Léo thought about the war. Have the English any chance? After all, Louis was over there. And besides, granting that the Germans are better than the English, it is pleasant to think that—perhaps they would be driven out.... But enough of these damn politics! Bertie is courting Mado, that man has a heart of gold, but she seems to be indifferent—the caprice of a spoilt child.... Dumas—is uncompromising, makes everything a matter of principle, it's dull being with him now.... Nivelles is just the same, he has published a new book. It seems funny—somewhere bombs are dropping, ships are sinking, Greeks are dying, but in Paris everything is gradually getting shipshape.... The Sudan goat turned out to be very juicy, but tough; it had been soaked in vinegar and afterwards braised for a long time.

"We were so sorry you did not come. Even Dumas crept out of his burrow.... Promise you will come next time."

"No, Maurice, I will not come. Don't invite me. I know that you are a loyal friend. But now we are—two different castes.... Why should I compromise you? You are an—Aryan, so they say. That's all right. I'm glad for your sake, at least they treat you with some respect. As for me, they have decided to kill me with contempt. But they won't—I have strong nerves. But at present things are lousy...."

"Do you think I am having a happy time?"

"No, I don't think that. You were happier before the Germans came. Only they have deprived you of truffles, whereas they are trampling upon me with their jackboots."

Lancier was offended—Léo thinks that it's all a matter of truffles, of former comforts. Whatever you may say—I am a Frenchman!

"Perhaps they insult you more, that's their hobby.... But it's not a matter of personal insult. I am—a Frenchman! Do you understand? If France disappears from the face of the earth you will be able to go to Kiev, to America, I don't know where. But what will I do? I, Maurice Lancier from Niort?..."

Léo yawned loudly:

"Stow it! I know all that from the German newspapers. You have turned out to be receptive, promising.... Better tell me how you gobbled up that African buffalo."

Lancier fumed. He could scarcely restrain himself enough to take leave of Léontine politely. On going out he thought to himself: my foot will never cross this threshold again. But after descending the steps he

went up again—he was in a whirl of emotions: repentance, anger, resentment and pity. He said to Léo.

"I thought I had forgotten my gloves, but they are in my pocket. I have become terribly absent-minded. . . . Listen, Léo, we must not quarrel. You may not come to visit me, that's your business. But if you ever need my assistance, remember—nothing will be too much for me. . . ."

Léo was touched. When Lancier had gone he said to Léontine:

"If anything happens, Lancier will help us out. We must not be downhearted! There are many good ways out. . . ."

"I don't see them, Léo."

"Well, look here! The English may get their dander up and land somewhere in Hamburg. Or the Americans may declare war. And what about the Russians? Have you forgotten? They are a special item, I have seen them—fanatics! They won't surrender and make Hamburger steaks out of a Sudan goat. Or Hitler may die suddenly. Or he may be killed. Why shouldn't there be a man with brains among the Germans? Or. . . ."

He said no more. Smiling sadly, Léontine asked:

"Or? . . ."

"We may go to sleep one night and wake up in paradise. The two of us. The sea, olive groves, sea gulls. And not another human being. . . . My love, my life, my paradise! . . ."

And Léontine, resting her head on Léo's arm, fell asleep with the same sad smile.

Lancier could not calm down, and what agitated him most was the business part of the conversation, towards which Léo had shown indifference. Lancier felt ashamed, and therefore blamed Léo. That night he thought he had a heart attack as Marceline had had. He could barely wait till the morning to telephone Morillot.

The doctor examined him and smiled:

"The food difficulties are having a good effect upon your liver. And your heart is like a young man's. . . ."

"But what happened to me last night? I was suffocating, couldn't fall asleep. . . ."

"Nerves. The world's anguish. Something must have agitated you."

"Yes, that's true. I had an unpleasant talk with Alpert. I think I got a little heated. . . . You know how sorry I am for him. . . . But one has to reckon with their orders, and on this point they are uncompromising. I told him everything. But he tried to prove that I had no feelings. That's enough to ruffle anybody, isn't it? I was at Verdun, wasn't I? . . . And who is he to give me lessons in patriotism? He can go away tomorrow. . . . They are a talented people, there's no denying it, but they spread themselves all over the place. And when you come to think of it. . . ."

Morillot burst into a roar of laughter.

"You see how quickly your organism copes with every danger. You were just about to fall sick with melancholia, but you at once found a way out—'when you come to think of it.' . . . But I'm in a hurry, a patient is waiting for me, unfortunately he is not suffering from the world's anguish, but from common or garden cancer."

* 11 *

Outwardly, Mado lived like everybody else. She had a fastidious father on her hands, and he wanted her to be an exemplary housekeeper. She did the shopping, talked with the women about their petty troubles; tried to help others; she often visited the Alperets, distracted Léontine from her thoughts.

When Mado pondered over the people she met and the talks she had with them, it seemed to her that everybody around her had died, and that the dead, for some reason, were acting in a comedy about a past life. Far better had they burnt Paris! . . . Yes, death would have been a hundred times better than this imitation of human existence. But people clung so desperately to this semblance of life, to a bar of chocolate, a pair of stockings, that Mado asked herself: perhaps they are right? . . .

She asked Sembat:

"What's to be done now?"

Sembat was flustered. Like everybody else, he had fumed, cursed, and had returned to his work. Mado's question agitated him.

"No use asking me, Mado. I am no hero. . . . Before the war Lejean reproached me for fencing myself off from life. I answered him: if there's a fight—I'll be in it. . . . I don't know, but perhaps if there was any shooting in the street I'd go. . . . But where is this fight? . . . In matters of art, I will not yield one iota. But run my head against a brick wall? . . . I can't do that."

Mado thought to herself: he is like all the rest. . . . He paints pictures, another clings to his job, a third got a Jewish shop and is glad. Sembat talked about Lejean. Mado had thought about him more than once, about Josette, and about the young workingman in the dark street. What are they doing? They have not surrendered, you can be sure of that, they believe, they are fighting. . . . Josette was not to be found—she has gone away, perhaps hiding under a different name. . . .

One day Mado visited Dr. Morillot. He was in a nervous state, and kept looking at his watch. She thought that he was in a hurry to go and see a patient. But suddenly he ran to the radio set and hissed "iss." There was a knock, as if somebody was at the door. Then the announcer stated that Asmara had been captured. Morillot whispered "that's

good!" Mado did not know where Asmara was. The announcer said that true Frenchmen were continuing the fight in conjunction with Great Britain. He's talking about Louis—thought Mado.... But Louis, too, was far away, like Asmara, like Josette.... When the radio stopped Mado asked Morillot:

"Do you believe the Germans will be driven out?"

"I don't know.... At all events, they won't be driven out by the French. We were a great state, now we are a German base, and a possible theatre of war...."

So Morillot, too, believes in nothing!...

That evening Lancier said to Mado:

"I can imagine how the Russians are gloating over our humiliation...."

"How do you know?"

Her father is working for the Germans, it disgusts him, he wants the whole world to be mean—it would make him feel better.... What is Sergei thinking now? She does not know, she will never know.

Mado lived in a vacuum. There was only one man who did not take his eyes off her, who followed her, lived for her—this was Berty, who was regarded as cold and unfeeling.

It was one of the first evenings of spring. The chestnut trees—what did they care about the Germans?—were already raising their white candles to the sky. Mado and Berty were strolling down an avenue. Mado vaguely thought to herself: this, too is an imitation.... Berty was saying:

"Can you picture to yourself the heart of a man of forty who is occupied with ores, workshops, contracts and shares? Even a desert is more verdant. I want to tell you that miracles do happen. I tried to fight it down. I have tested myself for two years. Now I know definitely—I cannot live without you. Not long ago you said that you value my friendship. Mado, it is not friendship, it is frenzy.... Why should I conceal it? I am not a schoolboy, and I am not afraid of looking ridiculous. You must become my wife."

She was astounded—so unexpected was this, and so masterful did Berty's voice sound.

"But it is impossible...." She searched for words. "You must not blame me, but it is impossible.... I highly appreciate your feelings towards me. You have done so much for my father, and for my poor mother.... I never thought.... No, it is impossible...."

"Why?"

"You do not know what has happened to me...."

"You are wounded...."

"No, I'm dead."

"I will restore you to life. You must become my wife."

"But that is impossible. . . . I do not love you."

"I know that, but I know that you will love me. You must become my wife."

She could stand it no longer, she fled. Next day he was by her side again, and in the same restrained but masterful voice repeated: "You must become. . . ." It was the same again next day. And this went on every day. He wrote her long letters replete with stern logic, and brief notes with words left unfinished in his frenzy. He pleaded, insisted, demanded. He telephoned, waited at the door, filled her room with fragrant flowers. letters and whispers. Day, and night she heard: "You must. . . ." He was crazy in his passion. But she? . . . What could she oppose to his emotion, strong will, persistence? Only quiet despair, blunted pain, indifference.

And so Lancier, deeply affected, exclaimed:

"We shall find some good champagne to celebrate an event like this, I hid a whole case from myself. I had a sort of premonition. . . ."

Mado decided to submit. She was congratulated; some, those who admired, talked about Monsieur Berty's intellect, good looks and talent; others, the envious ones, emphasized that "Cupid shoots with golden arrows nowadays." She smiled to everybody and expressed her thanks. Lancier was intoxicated with joy:

"How dreadful that Mother did not live to see this. . . . Now I can say it: when I was in a critical situation he saved us. He has done so much for our family—and besides, he is a—true Frenchman. I have heard him talk to the Germans—if everybody preserved such dignity. . . ."

Nivelle presented Mado with a book of his verses bearing the inscription:

*If you can die, die,
Don't look, don't weep. don't speak.*

Mado thought to herself: he is mocking me, and he is right. But he, too, is like that—he writes verses about Persephone, but has remained at the Prefecture serving the Germans. Who is he to judge me? . . .

It was Sembat who roused her out of her torpor:

"I expected anything of you. You might have taken poison, married the King of Siam, or have perished somewhere in Madrid. But become Madame Berty. . . . Really, it was not worth while making such a fuss. . . ."

She covered her face with her hands as if he had struck her. She must bear this too. . . . I knew what I was doing. Obediently she put on her bridal dress, obediently she answered "I will." And when they found themselves alone in Berty's vast empty house she plunged into oblivion. All that remained alive in her was her will—not to shriek, not to betray herself.

Day dawned. She glanced at Berty. he was asleep; his long face framed in the pillow reminded her of an ancient painting—waxen cheeks, black hair, Roman nose, thin colourless lips. She felt neither indignation nor resentment, she was tormented by nausea, as if all the filth of Paris, nights with Germans, the lascivious smiles lavishly bestowed by the conquerors, denunciations, the Gestapo men reeking of Chanel scent, the queues at the venereal disease dispensaries, the profiteers belching in the high-priced restaurants, the ragout of cat flesh in the saucepans of the poor, the sweat of dance halls where SS men danced with the daughters of contractors, cigarette stubs wetted by others' lips, the stinking second-hand market, all the filth, as if all the stench of the city filled that excessively clean and bare room. I am like that now.... What's the date today? The twelfth.... A year ago Paris fell. Why should I put on airs—with him or another—it's all the same.... A good thing it is not with a German....

She stood at the window, which overlooked the boulevard. It was early morning, and the solemnity of the hour was not desecrated by the presence of people. Birds were twittering in the trees. Attic windows shone pink like mountain glaciers. Why was it that at this moment Mado recalled Sergei, of whom she had not thought for a long time, recalled their last meeting, their talk about the saving power of love? The sensation was so strong that, after silently bearing the horrors of the night, she uttered a low cry. Berty did not wake up, but even had he awakened he would not have got a word out of her. Inhaling the freshness of the morning, she spoke to Sergei, promised to purge herself of this horror, called love to her aid, too late perhaps, but passionately, sternly she called, ready to perform feats of heroism, ready for sacrifice.

During those hours she felt strong, full of determination; but next day her bewilderment, her sense of impending doom returned. She said to Berty:

"You realize that we cannot live together...."

Her voice betrayed her weakness. Berty calmly answered:

"I demand nothing of you. You may live your own life here. Do you really miss Corbeille?..."

And, as if deliberately, Lancier came bursting into the room with a beaming face:

"I am so happy for your sake. Mado! ... I have decided to arrange a little gathering in honour of Nivelles, to celebrate the publication of his new book. You, of course, will come. I will try to prepare a real prewar supper...."

And Mado thought to herself: "Indeed, in what way is Corbeille better?..."

The young couple lived side by side as if they were strangers. Mado seemed calm, even indifferent. Berty could scarcely restrain himself.

He was ready to do anything to win a little affection. At first he hoped that time would smooth things out, but now he realized that he would never win Mado's heart, and he lost his head because of this unrequited love.

Mado often went out. Berty was jealous, racked his brains in conjecture. But she roamed through the drab outskirts of the city. The wind that blew from the Channel refreshed her, as if a different life was being wafted to her. This wind was the feeble dying voice of oceanic storms. Mado walked facing the wind, and a slight smile lit up her tormented but still beautiful face. She herself did not know whether this was the beginning of recovery, or the agony of death.

* 12 *

Corporal Keller was well known in the taverns of Dijon. He spoke French, did not mix his "b's" and "p's" as other Germans did, and was even able to tell old Burgundy from the bad Algerian wine which fully satisfied his fellow countrymen. Keller was also known for the fact that he had captured the heart of the tavern waitress, Mimi, who openly said that she would not exchange her German for anybody. The regiment had been quartered in the town since the summer, and Keller felt like an old inhabitant.

If anybody, three years ago, had told the modest Heidelberg privat docent that he would become a brave soldier, a tavern frequenter and the lover of a dissolute French woman, he would not have believed it. When he had thought of war in the past it seemed to him to be cruel and senseless. On reading Remarque's novel in his student days he got the impression that a man could not live amidst bursting shells; he believed that everybody realized this, and when anybody in his presence talked about the possibility of war coming soon he laughed—nonsense, diplomatic manœuvres....

But before he knew where he was he found himself in Belgium. He looked forward with horror to the impending battles, was ashamed of his cowardice, and in conversation with his comrades he would say with an air of bravado: "Do you call this war?..." But the distant rumble of the corps artillery made him feel that he wanted to vomit. His regiment did not take part in the first engagements, it was moved up after the front was pierced. The officers told them that they had a pleasant tour through the wine cellars of Champagne before them. But near Epernay they suddenly met with resistance—half a hundred Frenchmen occupied a wood. The motor truck in which Keller was riding was fired at, two of his comrades were killed and four were wounded. Keller was petrified with horror, and instead of lying flat he stood up straight and for some reason began to clean his spectacles. He was brought to

himself by a command from his officer; he lay down and fired like the others. An hour later they cleared the wood of the enemy. When Keller saw about a dozen Frenchmen with their hands up, he was overcome with merriment, he realized that he was alive, and the restored life was sweeter than the previous one had been. That night, departing from his habits, he got drunk in a cool cellar that smelled of wine, and then slept with a girl. Thinking of Gerda in the morning, he felt no qualms of conscience: war is war, you risk your life in the daytime and have a good time at night. . . .

The war soon ended, but the good times remained, and Keller's newly acquired self-assurance remained too. When he came home on leave in the winter, Gerda did not recognize him: it was funny to say so, but at thirty-two Johann had become a man! He talked very loudly, drank Kirsch liqueur and when she said that the first thing he must do is to pay a visit to the deacon he snapped at her: "It's none of your business!" She was offended and yet glad: she liked this Johann better than the one she had known before. At night he kissed and teased her: she recalled the elegant French ladies of the Folies-Bergère and sighed bewilderedly, as she had done in her maiden days. Johann had been unfaithful to her, of course, but it would be silly to reproach him for it—this is war. . . .

When she asked her husband whether one felt afraid at the front, he answered:

"Yes. And yet thrilled. . . . A man, probably, retains something of his childhood, and this is—a game, a cruel but thrilling one."

He was aware that he judged many things only from books. True, he had not taken part in a real battle, but still he had fought, his company had lost six men. He had a right to speak of the war as a front-liner. No doubt everybody felt fear, but this fear was like appetite drops that one takes before dinner, it stimulates the zest for life. He had felt more fear when sitting at home in his slippers waiting for the Gestapo men. . . . There is something in war that responds to human nature. The authors did not realize this and made shift with humanitarian arguments and tears. But Hitler did realize it. Is this not the cause of his success? He united us, roused our martial instincts and led us into the scrap; and now we are bound by our common responsibility. Am I a Nazi? . . . I can see how they have distorted anthropology. . . . But at present I am for Hitler—we must capture London, otherwise we shall all have to pay for Paris. . . .

When he returned to Dijon, Mimi seemed to him to be more bewitching than ever. She said:

"Do you know why I love you? You are—a brute, yes, yes, don't argue, you are a brute! You may be a professor, but I assure you that you are a real brute. Frenchmen talk a lot about love, but they never

lose their heads. They laugh all the time. . . . But you have only to take your spectacles off and you become a bull. . . .”

He could not understand that girl, suddenly she would begin to cry, scold herself, tell him that she was very happy, and at the most tender moments she would whisper: “Bull! Damned bull! . . .” Gazing into her eyes, tender and depraved, he thought to himself: What grace she possesses, and what a wanton! . . .

He never forgot his family, he sent them chocolate, sausage and soap; regularly, every other day, he wrote to Gerda, and at the end of every letter he added: “A thousand kisses.”

He liked France, her hills and vineyards, Gothic churches, narrow steep streets with steps, closely shuttered houses, women in black, the resonant speech, apt expressions, vivacious eyes. He felt like a tourist relieved of the boring duty of taking out his wallet at every step. His knowledge of the language made life easier for him; he emphasized that he understood and loved this country. Whenever he detected dislike in anybody’s eyes or voice he would say in a friendly tone: “You must not be angry with me, I am not here of my own free will. War is a terrible thing! . . .” This did not happen often, and Keller believed that although the presence of a foreign garrison was irksome to the French, they were not at all unfriendly towards the Germans.

He did not see Mimi for two weeks and he felt bored and angry. At last she came. He noticed bruises on her body.

“What’s this?”

“I fell down.”

“That’s a lie, and a silly one. . . .”

“Leave me alone. It’s not your business. . . .”

He realized that it would be foolish to be jealous, and create a scene, and besides, he was in an affable mood. Sated with kisses, he wanted to talk, to think aloud. Mimi, of course, was not much good at conversation. . . . But she was at his side, and he had no friends, his comrades were sleeping, drinking or, like himself, gadding about with girls.

“I’ve grown attached to you, Mimi, and yet you are a—real Frenchwoman. It’s surprising how this war has drawn us all together! We have splendid fellows in our company, they had no idea what France was like, but now they say: ‘They are good people, and they live well.’ . . . Friction occurs, of course, after all, we are uninvited guests. . . . But I think the French have learned to understand us, even to like us. You meet all sorts of people, it would be interesting to know what they say about us in town?”

Mimi laughed loudly.

“They gave me such a beating that I could hardly drag myself home.”

“Who?”

"I don't know who. . . . French people."

"I don't understand. . . . What for?"

"I understand though. . . . I love you, but I know it's a low-down thing I'm doing. When you clear out of here they'll murder me, you can be sure about that. . . ."

Keller thought to himself: after all, they are a perfidious lot. They smile at you, but behind your back. . . . Gerda is right—I am much too naive.

He went into a café he had never visited before and at the bar gulped down a large glass of cognac. He was feeling very despondent, and being an even-tempered man, these rare fits of spiritual perturbation upset him. He wanted to talk, to explain that he loved France, to expose hidden enemies. Unfortunately, there was nobody in the café except an old man, poorly but neatly dressed, with a ribbon in his buttonhole—a retired Lycée professor, or a rentier who had been stripped by the war? . . . Keller tried to start a conversation with the stout, sleepy looking hostess.

"It's a nice evening, Madame, real spring weather."

"It's not surprising, Monsieur, it's the end of May. . . ."

"Perhaps it's time to close and I am keeping you?"

"No, Monsieur, you still have another hour."

She retired to the back room. The old man smiled in a friendly way. Keller stepped up to him and asked politely:

"May I sit next to you?"

The old man did not answer; this put Keller out; his further behaviour showed the effect of his talk with Mimi and of the cognac. He sat astride the chair with his legs far apart.

"You don't want to talk, eh?"

The old man continued to smile, but said nothing.

"It's high time you dropped those manners! I'll compel you to talk. . . . It's no use you smiling. Verdun—is ancient history, I have seen your generals surrender. What do you think you'll kill me with silence? You swine! . . ."

"You must not be angry with the old gentleman, Monsieur. Monsieur Champillot is deaf and dumb, everybody knows him, your officer lives at his house. . . ."

Keller swore and went out, slamming the door in rage. The devil take them, they all pretend to be deaf and dumb! . . . He did not sleep that night, his head ached, the pink old gentleman with the disgusting smile and the bruises on Mimi's back kept hovering before his eyes. . . . Disgusting! It's all disgusting—the French, and the war, and I—a nice scientist to be sure, causing rows. . . .

A week later Keller learned that his regiment was being sent back to Germany. He was delighted at the prospect of meeting Gerda and the children. But later he thought glumly: that means that the war was over

for him. In prospect—a dull, insipid life and Gerda's talk about ration cards, points and Klitsch's intrigues. In a year everybody will have forgotten that he had been a—frontliner, they will laugh at his stories. But it couldn't be helped, that was life. . . .

It was sad to part with Mimi, to him she was the personification of France, sinful and charming. He thought she would cry and beg him to take her with him. But on learning that Keller was going away she said calmly:

"I suppose they'll send you to Egypt, or some other place. I'm convinced you'll all be killed. I am sorry for you, that's because I am a—fool. I'm not sorry for any of the others, nor am I sorry for myself. They'll murder me, I'm sure of that, and I have deserved it. . . ."

* 13 *

Berty found some solace in his work. In addition to Mado he had another passion—ambition. Formerly he had called himself the coeval of the twentieth century; now he said laughingly: "My century is victorious." In his opinion it was not aliens who were victorious, but new ideas, standards and habits. When speaking with Germans he found that they repeated his thoughts; while agreeing with them at heart, he skillfully and tauntingly argued with them—he wanted to emphasize his independence. Let the Germans see that they cannot get round me with compliments. Who went over to them? The riffraff, ten foolish fanatics, and ten thousand rascals. They need me, there can be no doubt about that. But I am not that old dotard Pétain. I have ideas, ambition, a will. I shall never become a servitor of the Germans. But if they are sufficiently intelligent and flexible, I may become their ally. That will be true patriotism—not only retain my place in France, but also maintain France's place in the new Europe.

Berty's plants were running in full swing—they made motor trucks for the German army; and Berty felt that he was a participant in a grand epic—his trucks were driving along all the roads of Europe—from the Norwegian fjords to the Thermopylae. They were in Africa. . . . They will be in England. Berty was confident that Germany would be victorious, and when Mado asked him one day what was going to happen to France, he answered: "It is better to be a private in the victors' army than a marshal in the army of the vanquished." . . . One day Dr. Morillot came to see Mado; he listened to Berty talking about the triumph of the new principle and then enquired with bluff merriment:

"Aren't you afraid the English will smash up your factories?"

Berty laughed:

"That's impossible. . . ."

Morillot was so astonished by this reply that later on he said to his wife: "Berty must have connections with the English, he is so cocksure."...

But Berty was convinced that England would soon be crushed.

He succeeded in getting the Germans to treat him with respect. "Not a single German will dare enter my office without my permission," he had stated at the very beginning of the occupation, and indeed, the Germans treated his factories as if they constituted a small state.

One of the influential Germans whom he had occasion to meet was Rudolf Schirke. The former owner of the Europe Bureau now engaged in diverse affairs—the press, the cultural life of France, and talks with prominent figures in Paris society (Schirke called these talks "unsentimental education"). What Berty liked about Schirke was his knowledge of France, his versatility and, above all, his audacity—other Germans very often said nothing, put off decisions, wrote to Berlin for instructions, but Schirke answered at once "yes" or "no."

It was on one of the first sultry days of the year when Berty said to Mado:

"Monsieur Schirke is dining with us today. That will be unpleasant for you, I understand. It is unpleasant for me. But we have to put up with a lot of things.... I have no business connections with this German, I have invited him only for the purpose of pointing to the injustice of a number of measures taken by the occupational authorities...."

Schirke was extremely polite, paid several compliments to the hostess and expressed admiration for the furniture—"You have a Nordic taste." Berty talked about the stupidity and rudeness of the Germans. Schirke listened to him attentively, now and again jotted something down in his notebook and said mildly, even guiltily: "Unfortunately, we have a lot of roughnecks in our ranks."...

Then the conversation turned to general subjects. In those days there was one question in everybody's mind: where would the German army go after the military operations in the Balkans were brilliantly consummated? Berty noticed that Schirke was somewhat excited and put it down to the old Châteauneuf-du-Pape—he had kept his guest's glass filled. Schirke said:

"I shall not be betraying any military secrets if I say that we are on the threshold of the last campaign. The fate of the British Empire will be decided in the East..."

"I, from the very first, was convinced that you would turn against Communism sooner or later. But the struggle will be a hard one, very hard. Whether we will be with you in this struggle depends upon yourselves. A year has passed, but you have done nothing to bring about a rapprochement between our nations. If you think you can intimidate or

fool the French, you are mistaken. The plain blunt question is—what place is France to occupy in the new Europe?”

Perhaps it really was because the wine was so good and Schirke had overrated his capacity to hold it, or perhaps because he had learned of the Führer's decision an hour before he had come to dinner, but for a moment he lost his equanimity, wiped his forehead with his serviette and said:

“France's place in the new Europe? You have a good proverb—the goat nibbles the grass on the spot where it is tethered.”

Mado got up and left the room without saying a word. Schirke at once realized that he had been tactless. With emphasized politeness he reverted to Berty's complaints, promised to take measures, said that Germany and France would be allies in the impending war, and repeated several times: “We will be bound by the comradeship of arms.”

Nevertheless, this conversation left Berty with a loathsome after-taste. It was a stuffy night and his head ached. He paced through the large bare rooms of his house for a long time. At last he timidly knocked at Mado's door. She did not answer. He pushed the door ajar. Mado was sitting in an armchair near the window. He called her, but she made no response. He cautiously stepped up to her and said: “You must forgive me.” He wanted to kiss her hand. She pulled her hand away and said softly, almost in a whisper:

“Don't touch me. . . . I'm afraid I shall kill you. . . .”

* 14 *

Before leaving France, Keller was able to pay a visit to Paris. He had long dreamed of revisiting the city which had seemed like fairy-land to him before the war. At that time he had felt bound both by Gerda's solicitude, the instructions he had received from Dr. Koenig, and the unfriendliness of the French. Now he stalked through the streets of Paris alone, free and proud—he felt neither fear nor his former humility, and although the city looked tarnished and faded, it enchanted him.

On the very first day he arrived he decided to visit Professor Dumas. True, I have lost touch with science during the past year, but the professor understands that war is not a study. It will be pleasant to meet a French acquaintance. And Dumas too will be pleased that a German scientist had come to pay his respects. . . . But Keller did not admit the main thing to himself: he did not like to recall his meeting with Dumas—he had behaved like a schoolboy then, now he wanted to present himself to the French scientist in a more favourable light.

As he ascended the steep staircase the thought suddenly flashed through his mind: suppose Dumas refuses to talk to me? After all,

there are irreconcilables among them. . . . No, that cannot be—he and Dumas are first of all men of science, there can be no moat between them.

The door was opened by Marie; she did not recognize the German soldier as the guest who had treated her culinary abilities with indifference; she ran to the professor shouting:

“Germans! . . .”

Dumas said calmly:

“Let them search. But perhaps they have come for me? . . .”

He buttoned his jacket and, going into the hall, he growled:

“If you have come for me, I shall not detain you.”

“Don’t you recognize me, Herr Professor? Johann Keller. Before the war you did me the high honour. . . .”

“Oh, it’s you! . . . The Indian. . . . All right, come in. There is such a masquerade going on now that one can’t recognize anybody. . . . Take a seat, don’t be afraid, everything is soiled here anyhow. . . . Unfortunately, I can’t treat you to anything, your countrymen have mopped it all up. Wait a bit, yes, there is,—at the very bottom, but something really fine! Old Calvados. What are you working on now?”

“I haven’t been doing anything in my line for over a year.”

“Capturing cities, eh? A dirty occupation! First, you capture them and then they will be recaptured from you, but not much will be left of the cities. Or of you. . . . I remember one of your professors complaining about overpopulation. Take care you are not reduced. . . . Forgive me for flying at you like this, I am living like a recluse. . . . I understand, of course, that you have no hand in this dirty business.”

“I, Herr Professor, continue, as before, to avoid politics. . . .”

“I too avoided them. But, you know, politics came uninvited. . . . Drink the Calvados, it’s a rare wine now. What a pity you are in that garb, a respectable man and a promising scientist in that lousy outfit. makes you sick to look at it! . . . What’s the matter—aren’t you allowed to walk about the city in civvies?”

“But why do you talk in that harsh tone, Herr Professor? I think our nations have drawn closer together during this difficult time, we have learned to understand each other. . . .”

“What did you say? ‘Drawn closer together?’”—Dumas jumped up and laughed. “Marie, come here! Look at this gentleman—he says that we have now ‘drawn closer’ to the Germans! . . . So if a gangster knocks a man down and thrusts a gag in his mouth he has ‘drawn closer’? . . .”

All this time Keller had kept himself under restraint, remembering that he had a famous scientist before him, but now he lost self-control:

“I thought that events had taught the French something, at least to be modest. . . .”

Dumas’ face flushed, he shouted:

"Get out of here, quick! Bring your Gestapo men. Don't pretend you have come here as a guest! Marie, see him out. Come on, you, get a move on! . . ."

Keller walked out in silence. Marie wailed:

"What have you done, Monsieur Dumas? . . . Now they will come for you. . . ."

He took her rough hands in his.

"Eh, Marie. . . . One must know how to live—be merry, sing, dance and drink, if you've got anything to drink. . . . And one must also know how to die, like a man. When a rabbit is wounded it squeals like a little child. But fell a tree, it falls in silence. . . . One must not be afraid to die, that, too, is a noble deed, if only you are a man and not a rag. . . . Open the window, don't let even the smell of him remain here. . . ."

And so Keller's last days in France were spoiled. In Aachen he caught up with his unit. They were dispatched to Poland. The soldiers tried to guess where the new war would commence.

"They say in Russia," said the sergeant. "The Russians don't like us. . . ."

Keller smiled despondently:

"War is everywhere now. Do you think they like us in France? They are only waiting for the opportunity to hurl themselves upon us. . . . I am sorry I didn't take a certain rascal to the Kommandatur, I didn't want to soil my hands. . . . We Germans are too trustful, and also too noblehearted."

* 15 *

Raya was dancing with Polonsky. Before that she had taken a glass of muscatel, she had wanted to feel gay: when she began to dance she had smiled; now she felt frightened, but she continued to smile—her face had become rigid. Her body, however, swayed to the rhythm of the dance. There was the persistence of fate in that rhythm. The saxophone whined like an outcast dog, the drum counted and recounted the beats; and amidst the whistling, wailing and rumbling the violin sobbed like a child. Suddenly it all stopped: a void, a pit, a silence that made one's head whirl. What shall I do?—thought Raya. The saxophone woke up again and whined: one must keep speeding on, swaying and whirling! . . .

The Continental Restaurant was crowded in spite of the hot weather. Tomorrow will be Sunday, would it not have been better to have gone to Svyatoshin, Darnitsa, or Pushcha-Voditsa, where you get the smell of pine, or of new-mown hay?

"The summer starts tomorrow, according to the calendar. . . ."

But summer had come long ago. It was hot. Why were they not

rowing on the river, why had they come here?... The music, the wine and the talk made one feel hotter....

"What do you think, Petya, will there be war?"

Who asked that question? Perhaps it was the young lieutenant. Or perhaps that fellow in the grey check suit? Or Yashchenko?

In the market place they were saying that the Germans would attack soon. Old Hannah came home in a fright that morning:

"Rayechka, they say there's going to be war...."

Everybody in his heart of hearts said to himself: It cannot be! The young lieutenant had married only the day before and was dancing with his Varyenka. How could he believe there was going to be war? How could that fellow in the grey check suit believe there was going to be war? He had come to celebrate a victory—overfulfilment of the plan, and soon all the shops would be filled with cups and saucers decorated with roses, corn flowers and with gilt borders. In three days' time the girl he was dancing with was to submit a treatise on nitrate nutrition of plants. War?... No, it was impossible! And Petya, who had been asked whether there would be war.... He has invented a new kind of coloured wall plaster and it was said that he had been recommended for a prize. Today he was celebrating his birthday. And suddenly war?... No!

"No," Hannah had said that morning, "it cannot be! Why, people were only just beginning to live...."

It seemed to Hannah that war had started very long ago, soon after her husband's departure. Naum was killed. Hannah's brother was killed at Peremyshl. Another brother was killed four years later in the Caucasus. People said that there would be peace, but there was shooting in the streets.... Petlyura gangs, Poles, God knows who they were.... Then came ration cards, queues.... Hannah had aged by this time. Suddenly—the White Finns.... Now, thank God, life was settling in its groove, houses were being built, you go into a shop—and you can buy everything.... And now they are talking about—war.... But war has only just ended. No, it cannot be!

It cannot be, muttered Steshenko, the geography teacher, as he dreamed in his stuffy room about a cottage in the country, a garden with petunias, and about a hammock.

It cannot be, said Zina. Her mind was filled with the heroic deeds performed by the heroes of old, but that was—literature.... In the next room twelve-month-old Shurik, the janitress' son, was sleeping—he must grow, play, and go to school....

Nobody believed there would be war, nevertheless, everybody felt alarmed. Who knows what the Germans will be up to?... But tomorrow—will be Sunday, the young people can dance to their hearts' content.

How petty Raya's drama seemed amidst the alarm that filled the world! She herself understood this, but her heart refused to reckon with

events. Polonsky was not merely a "flame," of which she had had quite a number—flirted, danced and forgot. No, Polonsky was—happiness. Happiness, or doom....

Osip spent over a year in the North. He was as pleased as a child when he saw the white sandy banks of the Dnieper, and then the steep street, and Raya's long eyelashes; he wanted to clap his hands and whirl round the room. But he only said: "I'm so glad I'm back, Rayechka."... And that very evening he ran out: "I must talk to Yashchenko." That night Raya whispered: "I have been looking forward to your homecoming so much! You know—I have been faithful."... He did not express surprise. Raya felt indignant: I am like a clothes chest to him—locked it up when he went away, and now he has come back—everything is safe and sound.... And her youth, her last days, were passing away....

She found it harder after her husband's return than before he went away. He talked to her only about his work, or about the Greeks having captured some place called Korçë. He never asked her what she was thinking about, or what filled her life. She said to him: "I have dropped my music altogether now." He answered: "A pity," and unfolded a newspaper. Sometimes he would begin ardently, almost piously to kiss her tiny hands and repeat: "Raya! Rayechka!..." And then he would go out. Her work at the office bored her. Her chief would look at her with his glassy eyes and say: "Can't you see I'm busy?" Alyenka was entirely in her grandmother's care now; that is how it turned out—Raya had paid little attention to her daughter before, she wanted to go to the theatre, to dances, and now Alya had grown fonder of her grandmother than of her mother. Nobody needed Raya, she could die now, and nobody would grieve....

It is not true, Osip loved her. But it was a strange love! Perhaps that is how people love on another planet.... In May he was sent to Pechora again. He was glad: "It will be interesting to see what progress they have made.... Don't take it to heart, Raya, now it's definitely for a month and no more." Perhaps he will come back as he promised, perhaps he will stick there for a year, after all, he himself doesn't know.... Is he human? And yet he loves her, shortly before his departure he confessed: "You know, Raya, once, when I was up there, I went out.... It was winter, dark. Suddenly I thought to myself, you are no longer with me—you have forgotten, gone away.... It seemed to me that I had gone blind and would never again see either Kiev or life. Just like a novel, sounds silly, but I cannot picture life without you."...

And I?... I think I love too, I am suffering because of him. Perhaps it is only a habit?... I don't know. But it is quite different with Polonsky—when he looks at me I feel good, and yet so frightened that I think I will die on the spot.... I'll go and dance with him again, but I must keep smiling, then he will not see what is tormenting me....

Polonsky was taller than Raya, and while dancing with her he looked down upon her; he did not smile, his face was always sad, looked slightly offended—because of the shape of his mouth, or perhaps it was his eyes. But he was neither sad nor offended, he was glad that he was with Raya all the evening. He was really and seriously in love, he had booked a place in Sochi, but he let it go, he could not part from her. They met rarely, and always in company. He saw that Raya was being drawn to him and was afraid. . . . He did not peer into the future, he lived from one meeting to the other. Their conversation was casual, often they talked about trifles, but those trifles seemed important to them, they questioned each other, rejoiced, had tiffs; it was a web of half-spoken words, vague hints; they passed from verses to the names of streets, from the streets to the rain, and from the rain to Chopin.

They walked out of the Continental. Raya knew that she ought to go home, that she ought to make small talk; but she walked slowly in the opposite direction, walked as if she did not see that Polonsky was at her side.

"Why don't you go to Sochi?"

"I don't know."

"Do you think there will be war?"

"I don't."

"Have you been to Sochi?"

"No. But I've been to Sukhumi."

"Is it nice there?"

"What I liked best was the journey—from Odessa."

"The sun and the blue sea, isn't that so?"

"No, there was a severe storm. Many were seasick. . . . I was on deck all night. It was frightening, but very nice. You know the verse:

*The hurricane roars,
The ocean sings. . . .
A century flashes past. . . ."*

"But I think it must be awful when there's a storm. . . . I have never seen one. But when are you going? In August?"

"I don't know. . . . Suppose war breaks out. . . ."

"But just now you said that—there will be no war. . . ."

"Did I? I don't know. . . . I was just thinking—shall we meet again? . . ."

They were walking down a dark deserted street. There were gardens all around. Stars above their heads. He took her arm and felt her pressing against him. Thinking of nothing he kissed her, she responded; then she withdrew her arm:

"Don't."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. . . ."

He took her hand, she pulled it away.

"Why don't you want to?..."

She remained silent. She quickened her pace; they were now walking down to the Kreshchatik. He saw tears in her eyes. They did not talk, only when they reached her house she said:

"You must not be angry. . . . I cannot act otherwise. I feel it, but I cannot explain it, either to you or to myself. No, it is not because I don't want to. . . . They used to say: 'Don't live as you want to, but as God bids you.' Well, there is no God, but still one cannot live as one wants to. . . ."

She was so agitated by what had passed that she did not think of tidying herself up, and she entered the apartment just as she was, with a tear-stained face. As luck would have it Hannah was not asleep, and on seeing Raya she exclaimed:

"What's happened?"

"Nothing. . . ."

"Antonina Petrovna was here, she said that the Germans are sure to attack, who told her that, I really don't know. . . . What have you heard, Rayechka?"

"I? Nothing. . . ."

Raya undressed and was about to get into bed when suddenly she heard Hannah weeping.

"Why are you crying?..."

"Lyova must have been killed. . . . How have we displeased God?..."

"But do you believe in God?"

"I don't know. . . . When everything is going well I don't think about it. But when anything happens. . . . Don't be angry, Rayechka. you have your books, you go to the theatre. . . . But I have only this—I remember how I used to pray and I feel better. I am anxious about Lyova. . . ."

"If war breaks out Osip will go. . . ."

"Osya is strong. But Lyova is like Naum was. . . . Osya will never lose his head. To tell you the truth—I'm afraid of Osip. It's funny—I nursed him, but I'm afraid of him."

"Why are you afraid of him?..."

"He doesn't say anything."

"He is like a child, he can't say anything about himself. I think I understand him now. . . . With him one does not even need happiness. But it's hard, oh so hard! I don't mean him. It's hard to live. Why. I have not lived yet, just played around. And yet it is hard. . . ."

Hannah pressed her to her breast as she did Alya:

"I know, I know everything. . . . If only there is no war! As for that, it will turn out all right. . . . There now, it is all right, there, you are asleep. . . ."

Utterly weary Raya fell asleep by the side of Hannah; in her sleep she smiled slightly; not as she had smiled when dancing with Polonsky, now her smile was gentle and serene. Hannah, too, fell asleep. Their breathing measured the passing of time like a clock. And that June night was a short one.

* 16 *

"I must get at least an hour's sleep," said Sergeant Grün, who was called Cockroach, because he wiggled his long thin moustaches so comically.

He soon got up, swearing and yawning:

"Can't sleep. . . ."

Nobody could sleep that night. They had been in this village for ten days, tortured by the heat, the mosquitoes and the unknown; and at last their torments had ended.

A young private with the chubby face of a child and very bright wondering eyes swore and spat, or rather pretended to spit—his mouth was absolutely dry. This was Klepper, the son of a house owner in Hamburg. He was frightened, but he wanted to be brave: let Lotte know that he was a man, not a schoolboy! . . . Fear gnawed somewhere in the lower part of his abdomen. Klepper thought aloud:

"Paul said that when they had wiped them all out in Niederstein one Communist remained, he was left-handed, and Paul said that he could be crushed with one finger, but they were unable to catch him, and they fell into the devil's pants because he cut Stramer's throat with a razor. When they surrounded the house where he was hiding he killed two Storm Troopers, that damned lefty made them sweat all night. If there are many Communists in Russia, we shall fall into the devil's pants. . . ."

"Now then, boy, go easy," said Cockroach. "Your lefty was a German, but these are Russians. I saw one Russian, he didn't even know how to blow his nose. They could fight when fighting was done with scythes and pitchforks, but they don't stand a chance against our playthings."

Cockroach had been in Poland and in France, and when he talked to inexperienced snotty noses, he was supercilious.

"This is not an election, my boy. Communist or not, he won't have time to look round. One thing I'm sorry for is—why aren't we in the Tanks? We are always late. I have a younger brother in the Tanks, those buggers skim all the cream. By the time we arrive all the old wine is gone and the young girls have been deflowered."

Klepper made an effort and laughed loudly. He thought how fine it would be to have his photograph taken with a girl and to send the picture to Lotte. Let her know that he is—a real man. . . . But the sense

of fear was still with him, it was now gnawing at the pit of his stomach. Klepper offhandedly asked Cockroach:

"Have you been in hot spots?"

"I never seem to get out of them. When we reached Saumur our tanks were already in La Rochelle. Lord knows where they spring from—but there they were. . . . Do you think they were French? Like hell, they were blacks, and they rushed at us as if we were African goats. They kept us busy until night. . . . They are a tough lot, of course, those Sengalese, but they die like all the rest. The Russians can smear their faces with blacking if they like, but all the same, they won't have time to go pale when they come up against our playthings. . . ."

A corporal wearing an Iron Cross corroborated Cockroach:

"They could still defend themselves when they had tsars and German generals. Now they can only agitate. They are—a colossus on feet of clay."

"They say the roads are rotten there."

"Well, if we got through Poland we'll get through Tartary."

Klepper could not calm down. He spat again and said:

"But the Führer says that they are planning to attack us. That means, they have a big army. . . ."

"Boy, did you think it was—Luxemburg? Of course they have a big army. That means that we shall have to build big prisoner-of-war camps."

Bauer, a forty-year-old Non-Com, a drawing master in civil life, frowned: A dirty business! . . . What are we barging into Russia for? Must the Russians become Nazis too? . . . Quite enough that they compel us to march under the orders of these snotty noses. Look what I've come to. I swipe chickens from Polish farmwives. . . . Exactly ten years ago, no, not in June but in August, I was to have gone on a trip to Moscow and booked at the Intourist on Unter den Linden. . . . I went there with Fritz. But later Krause invited me to Heringsdorf and so I didn't go. . . . Why am I here? What have the Russians done to me? Absolutely nothing. But the Nazis have made a skunk of me. I must have infected that girl in Kielce. . . . Her name was Janina. . . . Disgusting! And these idiots are glad. . . .

Klepper decided to write to Lotte; he wrote in a florid style, trying not to betray his feelings: girls like contemptuous lady killers. "A horrible night of last minute expectation." . . . He carefully struck out the word "horrible" and wrote "fatal." "There are lots of nice girls in Poland and my comrades gave them the glad eye. But my thoughts are far away. Over there, in the East, where the sun rises, and where perhaps my life will set! . . . Within an hour—we go into action. Do you remember the walk we had in Oberwald? I will do all I said. I am smiling to you from the frontlines." . . . After finishing the letter he took out the notebook

which Lotte had given him and wrote: "June 21. Night. Received orders. Nobody is asleep—we are preparing. Terrible." He tried to console himself with chocolate, but after biting a piece he spat it out—the feeling of nausea reached his throat.

Richter neither talked nor listened, he was thinking of Hilde. She must be asleep now. If not. . . . Perhaps Robert is with her? . . . He was at her side at the railway station. . . . He had remained in Berlin. Perhaps he is with Hilde? He arrived at nine o'clock and she made him wait a half an hour in the sitting room. Yawning nervously, he was turning the pages of a book, *German Gothics*. But she was changing her things, she put on a kimono, blue with storks, dabbed her neck with the cork of a scent bottle, came out, looked at Robert with her large mournful eyes: "Oh, it's you, my friend? . . ." As if she didn't know who was waiting for her! Then she cried out: "Oh, Robert! What are you doing? . . ." Now she was saying: "Suppose Kurt finds out? I wouldn't like to hurt his feelings. . . ." And Robert was saying pityingly: "Poor Kurt. . . ." No, it's impossible! Why am I tormenting myself with such silly thoughts? And on a night like this too. . . . I must forget about it. And Richter forced himself to listen to the conversation.

"They made a hash of Napoleon," the Corporal was saying. "That's the absolute truth. But they travelled in coaches then, today motors decide everything, distances can't frighten anybody now. . . ."

Richter reflected mournfully: They don't know what Russia is, like. . . . It is not a country, it's a world. You travel and travel—and can't see the end. . . . You are conscious all the time of your own insignificance. One can get lost there even if there is no war—you can die, and nobody will know. . . . The Russians haven't got the organization we have, that's true. They are queer people, you can't rely on them. You talk to them and don't know what trick they will be up to the next minute. . . . They may welcome us with flowers, I wouldn't be surprised. But they may fight like mad. I have been there, but do I really know them? Nor does Colonel Wilke know them, that's why he talks about "semi-peaceful penetration." One can understand a Frenchman, an Englishman, or a Dutchman, but here they are—Asiatics. Even the Führer probably doesn't suspect what a nut he has to crack here. . . .

"Of course, there's a lot of them," said Cockroach, "but the Chinese are still more numerous. War is not arithmetic. . . . I saw a French general surrender, he had eighteen ribbons on his chest—not a snotty nose, one would think, but he bawled like a calf because he realized that compared to us Germans he was a—snotty nose. The Russians may be more numerous than ants, but that is not of the least importance. I am telling you, boy, you can't go against our playthings with pitchforks. They say that the Cossacks have fine horses, but I'd like to see those horses when our tanks turn up."

The fool, thought Richter. He thinks the Russians have no tanks. What's Kuznetsk for?... I think we are underrating the enemy. What does "semi-peaceful penetration" mean?... But I dare not talk about it—they would decide that I am sowing panic. And besides, why should I frighten them, since there's a war on—we must win, and then it will all end. Lord, if only it would end soon!... Hilde said: "I will wait a year, two years."... But is it possible to understand what is in a woman's heart?... We are bound to win—we have organization and dynamism. A fellow like Cockroach won't halt, he pushes forward because he doesn't think; you can kill him—but you cannot shake his conviction, therein lies our strength. Of course, we shall win. But lots and lots of us will never return from Russia.... Of course, the Führer has taken everything into account. Poland, France, Norway, Thermopylae—that man knows how to wage war.... It will be a bad business if we don't finish them off before the winter. The Russian winter is—fierce. I was not there in the winter, but it gave me the shivers to hear them talk about the frosts they have there....

"Do you want some rum, Richter? It's Jamaica—from Bordeaux."

Richter drank half a mugful at a gulp.

"It has a fine aroma, but it gives you a headache. Russian vodka is different, it stinks, but it's splendid medicine, you can drink two mugfuls like this and wake up in the morning as fresh as a babe."

"I once drank vodka in a Russian restaurant in Motzstrasse."

Richter laughed:

"Everything is good in its proper place. I drank vodka in Siberia."

His prestige rose at once—everybody looked at him respectfully, even the veterans who had taken part in the march on France. Who did not know France?... But Richter had seen this mysterious Russia with his own eyes....

Klepper asked:

"Do you think they will defend themselves?"

"That I don't know. The more you watch them the harder it is to understand them. These people have no inner organization. When they drink vodka they grimace, grunt and swear, so that one would think that they were being compelled to swallow quinine. But I have seen Russian girls lay bricks, it was an awful spectacle, their fingers were bleeding, their fingernails were torn off and yet those girls were smiling as if they were at a wedding. You can never understand those Russians, no matter how you rack your brains. But they haven't got our organization and we shall smash them, that's clear to everybody. What's the use of guessing as to whether they will defend themselves or not, that's their business, in either case we shall be in Moscow, and I give you my word that I shall eat a whole pound of caviar with the greatest of pleasure."

"Do you spread it on bread?" asked Cockroach.

"In Berlin they spread it on bread, but in Moscow they eat it with a spoon."

"You've got it mixed up; I know that it is spread on bread, like butter."

"You will see soon—I will eat caviar with a spoon."

"What are the women there like? Worse than the Poles?"

"There are different kinds. Not a bad assortment."

Cockroach wiggled his moustaches:

"I will cuddle the first Moscow girl on my birthday!"

"When were you born?" Klepper asked hurriedly.

"On the eighth of August."

Klepper counted—forty-seven days... Bad enough!

The corporal said:

"Are you sure this music will end before the eighth of August?"

"Absolutely sure. As for eating caviar with a spoon, I don't believe it. On the eighth of August we shall be in Moscow, I'll bet on it if you like. Stakes—the prettiest girl in Moscow. Figure it out yourself—thirty kilometres a day, that's not much, ten days, say, for regrouping and drawing up the rear... I have studied the schedule..."

"I'll show them, wanting to knife us in the back!" Klepper swore, but horror shone in his naive eyes. "They'll learn what devil's pants are! We'll see what happens to their girls when I'm in Moscow..."

Klietsche, a lanky youth in spectacles, a student of philosophy, was sitting at a little distance from the rest. His comrades avoided him; he embarrassed them by his silence and unintelligible repartees. While the others were drinking, amusing themselves with girls, or telling smutty stories, he sat writing something in a large notebook, or reading a book. That man never smiled. He despised Cockroach and the other men in his company. It was only with Richter that he sometimes talked about the prospects of the war, about Nietzsche or about Egyptian architecture. He was nicknamed Marabou, and he did indeed resemble a bird—hook nosed, extraordinarily long arms, and a harsh, screechy voice. Laying his notebook aside he said:

"We are not going to Moscow for girls. Did you understand what the Führer said? Everyone of us now has only one lady love..." He stammered and then shouted out: "Death!"

Klepper yawned dejectedly. Cockroach growled:

"I'd rather your lady love kissed the Russians."

The short night was dying. The sky, which even up to then had not been sleeping, but only dozing, began to grow pink, to revive. Over there, beyond that little river—real war awaits us, thought Richter. How many books have been written about war, and still it is impossible to understand. It's the same with love—they write and write, and then comes along a Hilde, the daughter of a respectable businessman—knows English, plays

the piano, the most respectable girl imaginable, and it all turns out to be a horrible game, like riding in a burning tank. Beyond that river there are the same dim fields, hens are also cackling, women are carrying buckets and flaxen-haired children are crowding round guns. . . . In forty minutes' time it will begin. . . . Richter wanted to feel that these were—historic hours. I—am a participant in great events, my great grandchildren will read about me. But his thoughts scattered, at one moment he saw Hilde's untidy bedroom, at another a vast green space; his head swam.

"That rum is real poison."

Klepper answered:

"I swilled a whole mugful and it hasn't affected me a bit. . . . It's just the stuff for soldiers. In Moscow I will try your vaunted vodka. But those Russians will learn what devil's pants are! . . ."

"Go easy, boy, this is not a game of skittles, it's war!" Cockroach remembered how a snotty nose like that was killed near Beauvais.

The others were talking loudly and gaily, some about girls, some about Moscow, and others were simply bawling—day was breaking, the tedious waiting was over, soon they would be on the march. Marabou again drew aside from the rest and opened his notebook. In the sky, now light, a green rocket looked pale, even sad. Richter recalled Hilde's eyes and he screwed up his own. The village cocks crowed, answering each other. Cockroach shouted in a stentorian voice:

"One-two!"

* 17 *

Vasya had been working in Minsk since the winter. Suddenly Natasha announced that she was being sent to Minsk for the summer! Who could believe her? "It just happened, purely by chance." . . . The more she explained the more it was evident that she was fibbing. Something about aeroplanes that were to spray orchards to exterminate pests. . . . Yes, but why in Minsk? . . . At first this spraying business interested Dmitri Alexeyevich, but later he burst out:

"You are pulling my leg, Natashka? And here am I, taking it in like a fool. . . . I told you long ago—I like him. And you like him, it's no use you trying to hide it. You're a girl of twenty-one, you have come of age, haven't you? . . ."

Natasha laughed. Vasya won't believe either, he will decide that—I couldn't wait any longer. That makes you feel a bit sore. But perhaps I would not have been able to wait any longer. . . . Why pretend to be unfeeling? Let him think what he likes. But he will see her and will talk. . . . You can't drag a word out of him, but the matter must be settled—yes or no. The funniest thing about it is that she was really being sent to Minsk. Incredible luck, like in a fairy tale. . . . She was

given three places to choose from, and Minsk might not have been one of them.

Dmitri Alexeyevich said:

"You are beaming, as if you were going to Naples. Your little face has no shutters—everything can be seen in it. You might restrain yourself sometimes though, well, say, when you are pulling your father's leg."

June was green and hot. Vasya himself realized that it was high time he proposed, Natasha had not come here for nothing. . . . It would be easier here—neither Mother nor Dmitri Alexeyevich was here, nobody to question them. They would write, and that's all. . . . But how to tell Natasha? Vasya thought to himself enviously: Sergei would be able to, he is an orator. . . .

Vasya thought the matter over for two days and decided that he must avoid highfaluting words. If he starts talking about love Natasha may laugh—what's this, an opera? He must not talk about love, that's only in books. Dmitri Alexeyevich had taken a fancy to the words "I hear the flutter of wings." But it would sound silly to say them. . . . No doubt Mayakovsky talked to a girl differently, perhaps he did not talk about emotions at all. The best thing would be to say: "Let's live together." . . . No, that's coarse. Should he ask her: "Would you like to be with me forever?" That was pompous—why "forever"? Opera again. . . .

And so he couldn't think of anything. Everything passed off without words. Natasha's roguish eyes laughed and Vasya said: "You—little devil." . . . She felt shy and went into a corner, he dragged her out and suddenly hugged her. They laughed like lunatics, kissed, clasped hands and whirled round the room. Then he picked her up in his arms: "You are light! Like a feather." . . . She said: "We shall see. Suppose it turns out that I have a heavy temper? . . ." And she giggled: the idea that she might have a "heavy temper" seemed funny to her. They fell silent, frightened by the fullness of their happiness. So this is what it is, thought Natasha, quite different from what people said. . . . Enough to drive one crazy. . . . Vasya recalled the way Natasha turned up all confused and laughed again: "Do you remember, you said—'spraying from the air, honour bright.' . . ." She stopped him with a kiss.

They were to spend the day off together, and the day, which was already dawning, seemed to them to be a continuation of that wonderful night. They were shy of each other; now she and then he would say: "What are you looking at?" "Turn round"; and a moment later, forgetting everything, they would kiss. Natasha put the kettle on for tea and played the housewife: "I shall buy you some jam. Do you think I didn't see you take three helpings when you were at our house?" . . .

He wanted to show her "his" houses. It was a sunny day, and windy. Vasya's necktie fluttered comically; Natasha kept her skirt down with difficulty.

"It's windy..."

"But then it's not hot. Later we'll go into the woods—all right?"

He talked to her about the new houses:

"I don't like these ornamentations, but it can't be helped—the material is bad, and we have to cover it up. . . . In two or three years' time we shall have good material, and then the lines will be simpler. . . ."

Natasha frowned and then laughed:

"I don't understand anything about this, Vasya. But you will see—in two or three years I will understand everything. Just in time—you will have solid material, and a solid wife."

They walked on in silence—filled with happiness. Suddenly somebody grabbed Vasya's arm. He turned round—it was his workmate Lipetsky.

"He'll speak in a minute! The Germans have already reported. . . ."

The voice of Molotov was heard from an open window. Then words gave way to music. But Natasha and Vasya remained standing there, unable to collect their thoughts.

The world buzzed like a vast disturbed hive. Dmitri Alexeyevich, his face flushed with anger, kept on repeating: "Barbarians! What barbarians they are!" Fighting was already in progress in Poland, in Lithuania. Richter covered his gun with birch branches, and the branches had an acrid smell. In Heidelberg, fat Gerda was gasping with excitement: Johann would take Moscow any day now. In Berlin people sang, shouted, waited for triumphant communiqués. Far in the North, Osip delivered a speech: "The perfidious fascists have wantonly. . . ." Valya wept, her face buried in her pillow. And in Paris, Milet said to Marie. "It's all up with the fascists now. The Russians will come here, do you understand? . . ." Nivelle wrote: "The die is cast—either we, or they." . . . Motorcycles chugged in the Lithuanian forests. Byelorussian villages were burning. A wounded girl was calling: "Mama!" In Moscow, somebody was shouting at the radio station: "What about the broadcasts? Put some songs on! . . ." And songs flowed through shocked cities, songs of profound peace—of gardens, of a nightingale, of happiness. Guns roared, their thunder increased, grew in volume.

And little Natasha, on whose face everything was written, who had only just learned what people live for, stood stockstill, unable to move: fate had hurled itself upon her too, the fate of people, of Russia, of the world.

Around her there was a tumult of voices.

"The scoundrels!"

"I knew it. . . ."

"You always say that you knew beforehand. . . ."

"Without any warning. . . . The skunks!"

"But what about the German Communists? . . ."

"They will act now. . . ."

"It was splendid, what he said—'victory will be ours.' . . ."

"They'll find that this is not France! . . ."

"I'm afraid they'll come flying over. . . ."

"Do you think the war will last long? . . ."

"What with modern technique. . . ."

"I suppose our men have already crossed the frontier. . . ."

"They will call you up, Mishenka. . . ."

"Mama, everybody is staring at you. . . ."

"I'm afraid they will make a raid on Minsk. . . ."

"Don't be frightened, they won't be allowed to come near. . . ."

"Don't they understand that we have inexhaustible resources? . . ."

"We live in the most dangerous spot—near the electric power station. . . ."

"I'm going to the War Commissariat! . . ."

"Woe, woe! . . ."

Vasya went to his building lot, Natasha went to her University Settlement.

On parting, she said:

"How strange. . . . Just today. . . ."

"Natasha, whatever happens, we are now bound together. . . . Forever."

He was no longer afraid to utter that word.

PART THREE

* 1 *

NATASHA was put on duty on the roof. At night the city was pitch dark, like a forest, and Natasha shivered—the darkness frightened her. Next day the “alert” was sounded every now and again—enemy scouts came flying over. To Natasha it looked like an amusing game, she thought that the fascists were being kept away. And the announcer had such a cheerful voice when he announced: “The danger of an air raid has passed.”... And at once everybody crawled out of the cellars and slits.

Towards evening Natasha was free for an hour—she ran to see Vasya. He looked gloomy and troubled.

“At the War Commissariat they say ‘wait.’ But how can I wait? I’ve seen refugees from Western Byelorussia.... They attacked on the sly, but it will all be different in a few days’ time, we are drawing up forces. It’s awfully silly that I should be in the corps artillery, anti-tank artillery is the most important now....”

She was in a hurry to get back to her post. She started off and turned back again:

“I forgot to tell you. . . . I’m in a hurry, they’re waiting for me. . . . I will try to come tomorrow. . . . Listen, Vasya, if we don’t see each other, remember—you have a wife now.”

She kissed him, ignoring the people around them.

When she got back to the roof, glad news awaited her: four vultures had been brought down. That night she was not afraid, and the roar of the anti-aircraft guns gladdened her—see the forces we have! Natasha felt like a soldier: I too am fighting.

On Tuesday morning she saw a large number of aircraft, they glistened in the clear sky; it was pretty, festive. Natasha said to a student she was unacquainted with:

“There they are, they’re ours! . . .”

Suddenly everything shook, a loud explosion was heard, a second, a third. . . . The student pulled her down. She did not understand and

straightened up. Again... She covered her face with her hands as if to protect her eyes. When she looked again everything was enveloped in black smoke—a large block of buildings was on fire. She was terrified: the fire frightened her. Then her anger rose: the scoundrels, killing unarmed inhabitants!... I can't do anything. I stand and look on, that's the most horrible thing about it...

Now the houses near the factories were burning. Vasya is there!... Natasha no longer felt afraid, she no longer felt anything except rage: her temples were throbbing, she gasped for breath. If only they would bring them down!... And when one of the bombers caught fire Natasha shrieked in frenzy: "It's down! It's down!" Other aircraft continued to bomb the city.

"Incendiary!"

Natasha did not know what she was doing, but she did the right thing.

The student congratulated her, vigorously shook hands with her. Again she heard a terrific rumbling—as if a train was speeding straight at her; she crouched, but there was no explosion. At last the aircraft flew away.

Natasha ran to the factory district; shattered glass crunched under her feet. Women shrieked; they were carrying children, bundles. It was impossible to pass—craters, heaps of bricks. Some of the houses were burning. She failed to find Vasya: he had gone to the Party Committee. Lipetsky calmed her: "I saw him after the 'all clear.' We have quite a lot of casualties..."

On returning to the University Settlement Natasha saw an unexploded bomb outside the Physics Building. That was the very one... The thought frightened her: I could be lying here dead, and no sun, no Vasya, nothing! What is frightening is the n-o-t-h-i-n-g!... A truck drove up to the Medical Institute; dead bodies were unloaded from it: a woman of about forty, a man in a white embroidered blouse, a girl—her legs torn off, but her face looking not as if she were dead, but as if she were asleep, she looked like a broken doll; an old Jew, a pregnant woman... Natasha had never seen dead bodies before and she wanted to turn away, but she forced herself to look. I may be dragged out like that—tomorrow, or next week... There's nothing to be afraid of, they feel neither fear nor pain now. It's their relatives... If only Vasya isn't killed, that's the main thing... What a pretty little girl!... The bodies were covered with a tarpaulin. Then a wounded old woman was brought up, she was shrieking with pain, her arms were twisted. As she was carried out of the truck she left a thin trail of blood on the sandy road. But everything around still reminded one of peace: the garden, the fountain, the green benches with inscriptions "Varya," "7/V 1941," "I have passed!" "Don't believe Masha..."

In the evening people said that the electric power station had been

wrecked. The Komarovskiy Woods were on fire, the air became hot and suffocating. Natasha gazed at the fire all night and thought about Vasya. In the morning he came, and the first thing he said was:

"My houses! . . . Nothing left, rubble. . . . Never mind, we'll build others. . . . It's awful, the War Commissariat keeps on saying 'wait'! I'm anxious about you, you must go away. . . ."

"And you?"

"I am a commander in the reserve, I may be assigned to my unit within an hour. But you must go away. At present they have a superiority of forces. It will be the other way round in a few weeks' time, but at present the situation is serious. . . ."

"How can I go away without you?"

"Everybody is parting now, Natasha. And you must do as I tell you. I understand the situation better than you do. They will take you to Borisov by car and from there to Moscow by train. . . . They are leaving in a minute, you must hurry."

All this was so unexpected that Natasha was not yet conscious of the parting. She stood in the truck among other women; they crowded round her, but she wanted to have another look at Vasya; she saw that he was making an effort to smile. Perhaps I shall never see him again! . . . The thought petrified her. They drove past burning buildings; women pressed their children to their breasts, wept both from horror and from the smoke; the only thing they talked about was—will they manage to get away?

Automobiles and carts streamed along the highroad; old women plodded along carrying bundles; one woman carried a sewing machine on her back; an elderly man was lugging a large bundle of books, every now and again he sat down in the hot dust and said: "My work for the past thirty years." . . . A woman who had lost her child was running from one person to another enquiring: "Have you seen a little girl in a pink dress? . . ." The truck on which Natasha was riding pushed forward with difficulty; at times the dust shut out everything so that it was impossible to see the people, only the sounds of wailing, crying children and motor horns were heard.

Suddenly the driver put the brakes on.

"Run! . . ."

The women with children ran to the wayside ditch. Natasha ran with them; then she looked round—what was the matter? Next to her stood a man clasping a brief case to his chest: he was looking at the sky, shielding his eyes from the sun with his hand. Natasha saw three aeroplanes. How low! . . . For some reason she recalled her dreams: Professor Kartsev had wanted to take her with him on his experiments—to spray apple trees from an aeroplane—she pictured to herself an apple tree in blossom. Something rattled loudly. She dropped to the ground without thinking, probably because the man with the brief case had done

so. Shooting. She lay stretched out, she would have liked to become quite flat, level with the ground.

When everything had quietened down she got up, shook herself and said cheerfully to the man with the brief case:

"All clear! We can move on now. . . ."

He did not answer. He has probably fainted. . . . I must unbutton his blouse. . . . She touched his chest and at once drew her hand away—the blood was thick and sticky. He was still clasping his brief case. Natasha put her ear to his breast, as her father did to his patients; the heart was still. She was all smeared with blood, she shrieked; people waved their hands beckoning to her. She stared hard into the dead man's face—in some way he reminded her of her father, only he was younger. . . . The people in the truck shouted that they would not wait any longer. Natasha wanted to take the brief case, but the hand was tightly clenched.

Soon the truck stopped. There was firing ahead. A crowd came rushing from the opposite direction; they were shouting that the Germans had landed troops from the air.

"Paratroopers near Borisov! . . ."

No soldiers were seen. People rushed about, went off into the woods. Some said that it would be better to go back home—the Germans were everywhere. . . . A pockmarked man of about forty shouted:

"What are they, wolves? . . . We are not Communists. . . . It's different if you're a Jew. . . ."

He pronounced it "Joo."

Natasha was beside herself with rage:

"How dare you? What are you—a fascist?"

"I am a man. And who are you to interrogate me?"

"I? . . . I'm a student. A Young Communist Leaguer."

He sniggered:

"Well, if you are a student, go on with your learning. But don't teach me, I'm taught."

Natasha's face flushed with anger:

"I—am the wife of a commander, you—you are a traitor!"

When she said that she was the wife of a commander several of the women took her part. One of them shouted:

"I have two sons—both commanders. But you, you skunk, you are glad the Germans have come, aren't you?"

The pockmarked man disappeared in the crowd.

Firing was still going on, but it was impossible to say who was being fired at. The truck driver swore.

"If they send me into action—I'll go, but what's the use of dying for nothing? . . ."

Natasha saw that he was deadly pale and his lips were trembling. He abandoned the truck and went off.

Natasha found herself alone; there were many people about, but none that she knew. She walked on for several hours without stopping. Twice the road was fired on, so she walked through the woods. For a moment it seemed to her that nothing had happened, she was simply taking a stroll—here were some wild strawberries, ever so sweet.... Nobody would gather them. War.... The man with the brief case remained in the road.... Probably a doctor or a teacher.... What's happened to Vasya?... Everything in Minsk was burning now.... If only they would assign him to his unit soon, they would all be together there, it would be easier.... But it was awful in the city—the people fled, he alone was standing and trying to smile....

She slept until evening and then went on again. The woods ended. She asked a peasant woman for a drink. She brought her some milk and pitying her, she said:

"Where are you going? The Germans have cars, they will overtake you...."

Natasha was terribly frightened, not by the thought of being killed, but by other people's fear, other people's tears, by this peasant woman's pity. People were rushing about madly, but the Germans were calmly killing.... Children were wailing, carts were wailing, and everything was spinning round like a top, there was no sense, no way out....

Next day she could scarcely drag herself along, she was worn out, suffering mental torture. Suddenly she saw some soldiers: they were artillerymen. She asked:

"Are there no Germans ahead?"

A Red Army man laughed:

"Perhaps you think there are Germans in Moscow?"

Another, looking Natasha up and down, said in a friendly tone:

"What are you laughing at? Can't you see the little woman is scared? She hasn't been trained to this business.... Don't get excited, my dear, you'll need your nerves yet. The Germans have barged in, it's true, but wait a week or two, we'll kick them out...."

She wanted to kiss these men. They talked like Vasya. Why had she lost heart? Shame!... Women with children—their panic can be understood.... There were also cowards.... But these were sturdy, they laughed.... The Army is like that—so it's true: a week, well, a month—and it will end.... Then our men will march through Germany....

Towards the end of the day she got a lift on a motor truck. They reached Smolensk. Here Natasha again lived through an air raid. She tested herself. I'm not afraid, it's true. I'm not afraid! I already know—which are ours and which are enemy.... I must not be afraid, I must fight, like Vasya, like those artillerymen, like the whole people....

Dmitri Alexeyevich gasped when he set eyes on Natasha: perhaps it

was because she was, so tired, or because of all she had gone through, only she had changed—she was grown-up.

"Are you well? Take care, this is not the time to fall sick. I won't attend you, I have enough work to do with the wounded! ... All right, go and have a wash, then have something to eat and a sleep, and you will tell me all about it tomorrow. ..."

But he could not restrain himself and began to question her about how she got home. She told him everything; and amidst the frightful vision of burning Minsk there passed unnoticed (at least that is what she thought) the words, said in passing: "Vasya and I are married."

"You've come just in time," said Dmitri Alexeyevich. "I'm sending Mama to Aunt Oiya in Atkarsk. You will go with Mama, it's silly to stay here—Moscow will be bombed, that's obvious. Nobody needs you here, you'll only be an extra worry. ..."

Natasha shook her head:

"I'm not going to Atkarsk. Don't shout. I won't go just the same. I shall go to the front, yes, yes, that's no fantasy, I have thought it all over, and that's my firm decision. ..."

"Is that so? Haven't your father and mother a say in the matter? And what will you do at the front? This is none of your 'spraying'! Vasya is at the front, so she must go! ... This is war, my dear, do you understand?"

"I understand. Vasya has nothing to do with it. ... I can't remain in the rear. I will be a torment to myself. ... I have seen them killing children. They killed a man right next to me. ... Fool that I was for not taking his brief case, his family ought to be informed. ... I hate them! Don't argue. Papa, it's very serious. I have tested myself, I won't run away, I'll stick it. ..."

Her mother began to cry. But Dmitri Alexeyevich suddenly hugged Natasha:

"Good girl! ... No, those savages won't get us, we are not that sort! That's what our people are like, a girl, a grasshopper, and yet she is—determined to fight! ... Eh, Natasha, I'm sorry for Mama—I am going into the army, she'll find it dull alone. You will find it dull, Varyenka, I feel that, but try and bear it, it can't be otherwise. ... Natasha is right—it would be a torment. ..."

* 2 *

Vasya was saying to Lieutenant Avanesyan:

"What sort of battery commander is he? He doesn't know the most elementary things—"B.R.," "D.R." It's not surprising we are getting it in the neck! ..."

As a matter of fact, everything that was taking place was surprising, unintelligible to Vasya. He sought for an explanation, but in vain. Sever-

al days ago he had blamed Blagov for everything: the skunk had the insolence to say that it was no use, we would not be able to cope with the Germans! Grew up, went to school, lived in clover, and now they turn their backs on the people and are ready to lick the boots of the Germans!... Then a technician from the A.S.B. arrived and related that near Grodno the aircraft fuel tanks were filled with water instead of petrol. Vasya was shocked; so there are traitors! Lay low, and are now knifing us... Perhaps that was the reason?... Yesterday Avanesyan said that two batteries had been sent forward, but were given no ammunition. What bungling! Evidently there are people who are fighting with no heart in their job, and here every detail counts.... Just now Vasya was indignant over the ignorance displayed by Senior Lieutenant Dolgopyatov:

"Obviously, a man like that doesn't know how to fight." After a brief pause, he added: "But do I?..."

The communiqué was bad again: "superior forces"... Can't they really be stopped? After all, we are stronger... Of course, there are cowards, traitors, fools. But how many of them can there be?... They are exceptions. But the people are behaving splendidly. And there is the backbone—the Party, there is Stalin. Can the fascists be compared with our soldiers? Why are we retreating? It's awful, yet nobody can explain!... Three days ago Vasya began to talk to Captain Nenashin, but the latter cut him short: "Panicky?..." Avanesyan looks at you with his kind sad eyes and says nothing—he doesn't understand either.

During the first days Vasya had thought things were bad only on his sector. It was now evident that we are retreating everywhere. That means that everywhere there was the same "mess up" as Avanesyan put it. The men are fighting well. Yesterday Volkov was wounded in the stomach and as he fell he shouted: "Who'll pass them up?..." They held on under terrific fire and then learned that the infantry had retreated long ago. Three times a day they hear that damned word "surrounded," and it is enough for one man to say it—for all of them to get nervous and strain their ears to find out from which direction the firing was coming. But the firing was coming from all directions—tanks break through, motorcycles.... It is impossible to find out where to go, what to do. They were told that they would be assigned to the division that had broken out of Brest, but there was no such division. Now they did not know under whose command they were.... They would have to break through by their own efforts. You approach a village and you think to yourself: suppose it's a German ambush?... How many kilometres had they covered that way? Two hundred at least. He had been assigned on the twenty-fifth. Today was the third or fourth, a week in all....

"Do you understand this rotten business?" enquired Avanesyan. He said aloud what was tormenting Vasya. And to his own astonishment Vasya answered:

"There's nothing surprising about it, they have been at war for two years. We shall learn. . . . Meanwhile, things are bad! . . . We are fighting like children, just scrawling. Perhaps the regular army men understand things better, but even for them the business is new. . . . Do you know why things are going hard with us? We are not seasoned yet. Take me, for example, to me life seemed a straight smooth road. My father and mother, they fought: my father was exiled, my mother sat in prison. But I had everything prepared for me. I didn't have to decide anything. And now, bang! . . . I was in Minsk, walking with a girl, and suddenly—war! . . . I think that's the way nestlings are taught—they are thrown out of the nest—either they fly or dash themselves to death. We won't be dashed to death, we are not that sort. . . . Only we must think differently now, how—I don't know myself, but differently. . . ."

"If only we could get to know what our task is!" Avanesyan emitted a sickly yawn. "What a mess!"

They now numbered over a hundred; with them marched the remnants of a sapper battalion—they had broken out of encirclement.

Whether it seemed so to Vasya, or was really so—the countryside in those days was exceptionally charming and exhilarating. Glancing now at the meadows dotted with bluebells, wild carnations and snapdragons, and now at the dark woods filled with a mysterious freshness, Vasya thought: and this we are giving up, the most simple and precious—the daisies, the bilberries, the hallowing, the trees which saw our grandfathers, the soft, fragrant moss—the earth, yes, that's it, the earth! . . . He felt that the earth was not a term, not soil, not simply what was under one's feet—it was what one died for, for warm, black, or green earth, for that bush all white with pods. . . .

They slept in the woods. Firing was heard from all directions. The men were worn out, it seemed as though they would not wake up even if you fired right over their ears. . . . Day dawned: everything assumed a rosy tint. For a quarter of an hour it was quiet. Even a woodpecker began to tap. And suddenly, somewhere near—a machine gun. . . . It was three kilometres to the highroad. Several of the men volunteered: "We'll go and have a look. . . ." An hour later they came back: the Germans were on the highroad.

"Where are Goryev and Kovalchuk?" asked Vasya.

"Goryev was killed."

"And Kovalchuk?"

"When we were going out there he said: 'There's nothing to look for. . . .' He said his family lived not far from here. As soon as I caught sight of the Germans I dropped flat. But he, the skunk, crept towards them. . . ."

Lukachev said:

"Everything's clear. . . ."

Lukachev's face was contorted with fear, as if he had been drinking vinegar; he said in a cracked voice:

"All the same, we'll not get out of this. . . . They have taken Minsk, and we are messing around here like fools. We ought to surrender, that's what! If any of the officers want to die. . . ."

One of the men asked timidly:

"But won't they do Kovalchuk in? . . ."

Vasya stepped up to Dolgopyatov:

"Comrade Senior Lieutenant, give the order to shoot."

Dolgopyatov said nothing. Vasya saw that his eyes were dull, unseeing. And Lukachev kept on shouting:

"They won't touch us—we were drafted! . . ."

Then Vasya stepped up to him and fired point-blank. Lukachev fell prone to the ground, shouted something, but what he said was unintelligible. Vasya fired once again—at his head. The man who had gone to the highroad swore:

"Skunk! Oh, the skunk! . . ."

Vasya said nothing; his temples throbbed; every now and again he wiped his perspiring face with his hands. When he had calmed down he said to Avanesyan:

"The first man I killed—was one of our own. . . ."

"A mess," answered Avanesyan.

Towards evening they emerged from the woods. Dogs barked: there was a village nearby. They halted—there might be Germans there. But the men were tormented by hunger, even their rusks had given out. Volunteers went to reconnoitre; there were no Germans in the village. The men pounced upon the bread, the milk, the backfat.

Vasya and Avanesyan were sitting in a hut, a sturdy big-breasted girl was making pancakes and smiling. A child squealed. The clock ticked. The honey was sweet and fragrant. Peace, profound peace. Could one believe that fighting was going on nearby, that men were falling, the death rattle in their throats, dying? . . .

A man of about thirty was lying on the bunk above the stove. Vasya had not noticed him at first. Leaning over the edge he looked at the officers. When Vasya asked him how to get to the Moghilev highroad through the woods he answered:

"I don't belong to these parts. . . . You'll not get away anyhow—you are on foot, look how many cars and motorcycles they have. . . ."

Vasya asked him angrily:

"How is this—a young man like you not in the army? Are you a deserter?"

"Why a deserter? I have a finger missing. . . ."

The old housewife told them how to get to the highway and then began to weep:

"I have a boy in the army. Tromping, like you. . . . Take some more honey. . . ."

The man on the bunk wouldn't stop talking:

"The Germans are strong. But what are our men doing? . . . Scooting off. . . ."

Quiet Avanesyan flared up:

"Look, you fool, what a country we have! Do you think they'll reach the Caucasus? They attacked us unawares, like the skunks they are, and that's what's caused the mess up. . . . Wait, we'll soon put things straight! A finger missing, you say? Never mind, you have nine left, you can fight. You've got no head, that's the real trouble. . . ."

The big-breasted girl had eyes like beads, bright and fixed; it was impossible to say what was in her heart. The housewife wept quietly, drying her eyes with her sleeve. The grandfather took a pull at his makhorka, inhaled, coughed and said:

"Oh, things are hard, sonny, it breaks your heart!"

On hearing these words Vasya felt relief at once. The people are sound at heart, they are not yielding. . . . If only they could get through! He rested his head on his arm and fell asleep.

Until midday they marched through the woods; then they came to open country. The sun was scorching hot. The rattle of machine guns was no longer heard, and even the sound of gunfire was now distant. They had all calmed down. Vasya was tormented by thirst. He recalled a soda fountain in Minsk—ice-cold aeriated water. . . . What a fool he had been not to drink the whole stock then. . . . One sip! But there was not even a sip.

When the sun went down the rattle of a nearby machine gun was suddenly heard; they had blundered upon the enemy. At first they could not understand from which direction the firing came; then they looked round—from the ravine. The Germans were entrenched in it. The ravine ran in front of a river. Vasya was of the opinion that beyond this river—were our forces. There was no cover in the fields. Dolgopyatov seemed to wake up after a long sleep; in a thin, even squeaky, voice he shouted: "Hurrah!" and dashed forward; only to fall at once—with a bullet in his chest. The others ran on, dropped behind hummocks and ran on again. Vasya remembered nothing. he was very excited, he swore; he ran, holding a pistol; a private handed him a rifle he had taken from a wounded man and Vasya ran on with his rifle tilted. He killed two Germans. The men dashed across the river. Avanesyan was wounded in the arm, but he was as delighted as a child:

"Just think of it—artillerymen and sappers, and yet we won in a hand-to-hand fight! . . . That's a lesson if you like! And you were worried about Dolgopyatov not knowing what 'D.R.' is. . . . A mess up! I'm sorry for Dolgopyatov, he died splendidly! But we gave those Germans what for! . . ."

They marched on for several hours more and again firing was heard. This time it was our side that was firing—they thought it was Germans approaching. Happily nobody was killed, only one sapper was slightly wounded. But after that they swore for a long time, good-naturedly, but fiercely. It was a regiment that had recently arrived from Moghilev; the men had not yet been in action and were nervous. Among them were many Caucasians. One of them questioned Avanesyan:

"What are the Germans like? Fierce? Have they many tanks? . . ."

The Lieutenant gave Vasya and Avanesyan a meal. A nurse came up, stout and sleepy-looking, with kindly eyes. She dressed Avanesyan's arm.

"This is my first dressing at the front. . . . The bone is not affected, nothing serious. . . ."

They had a good sleep. But as soon as day dawned—the Germans began to bomb the copse. The nurse was frightened and kept repeating without stopping: "Oh! Oh!" It sounded as though she were puffing. Two of the men tried to calm her:

"Don't be afraid! They won't see you. . . ."

And with evident pleasure they stroked her broad warm back.

Vasya was happy; he did not even notice the bombing of the copse. We got through, what luck! . . . It seemed to him that the worst was over now. Only yesterday he could not think of Natasha, she was infinitely far away. But now he asked the Lieutenant:

"Do you get letters? . . ."

I will write today and say that we got out of an encirclement. No, better not write about that—she will become alarmed. . . . Why should they know in Moscow? . . . Let them think that all's well. It will be well soon, it certainly will be. I've been fighting only ten days, but I have learned something. Before I used to wonder—does it frighten you, or not? I thought—suppose I am frightened? But now I know—you feel very frightened before going into action. You lose your appetite and you feel sick. But when I was dashing towards them I felt no fear, then you don't feel anything, the only thing you know is—we must get there—and the noises in your head. . . . It's a good thing we've got into this regiment, everything is all right here, they've got the materiel, the commanders seem to be a sensible lot. . . . Evidently it has been decided to make a stand here. High time! The Lieutenant said today that the Germans have reached Berezina. Individual tanks, perhaps; they can be cut off. . . . Natasha will be glad to receive a letter. . . . But suppose she didn't get there? . . . No, that's impossible. They left on the twenty-fifth, all was quiet on the highroad then. Of course, they might have been bombed, but that causes more noise than damage. . . . She is in Moscow now, thinking what's happened to me. . . . Natashenka!

He had never called her that, but now he said it aloud. Avanesyan asked:

"What?"

Vasya made no reply, he only smiled.

Then they went to Major Balashov's tent. Vasya reported how they had marched from Rakov—Senior Lieutenant Dolgopyatov and six men had been killed in action, three were severely wounded, the sappers were led by Lieutenant Ruben. The Major treated them to cigarettes and Vasya blissfully inhaled—Byelomor! But Balashov said:

"Our regiment is surrounded. We are waiting for orders. You will come out with us."

* 3 *

The days were like a necklace—bead after bead, and if the necklace breaks and the beads scatter, it means that misfortune has entered the house. In that hot green summer the necklace of the people broke: yesterday became remote and unintelligible. Was it so long ago that Sergei had argued with Belchev in support of his project; that Nina Georgiyevna had waxed enthusiastic over a pupil of hers who had recited Hugo; that Lukutin had sat at his desk describing a new kind of building material as if he were composing the lines of an inspired poem? Was it so long ago that people had spoken about rest homes, about bookings for these rest homes, had rejoiced on having obtained a new apartment, had inquired about the price of a comfortable armchair, had been jealous, had been troubled over a son receiving bad marks for arithmetic and had argued about the new presentation of "Madame Bovary"? Was it so long ago that life, in spite of a thousand disappointments, affronts and difficulties had seemed so well arranged, firmly established and joyous? But somebody cut the string—and the days, the years, life was scattered.

Outside the mustering centres women were standing silently; there were few tears—the feelings that crowded the heart were too tense for tears. Jackets, white-duck suburban suits hanging limp on the wall like dead bodies. The theatres were deserted; the railway stations became animated.

"I've just come from the Kiev station. . . ."

"Thirteen hours nought-nought at the Byelorussian station. . . ."

At night, old men, women and children stood outside their houses—on duty; it was new to all of them, they were filled with pride, mixed with anxiety. Golden sand was brought up; when a youngster ran up to the sand, thinking it had been heaped there for him to play with, his mother's heart bled.

Somebody with a harsh voice entered people's lives, he looked at them with a round face, he had neither eyes nor ears, only a mouth, which belched frightful words: "At Ostrov. . . . On the Dnieper. . . ." On meeting each other people said gloomily:

"A new direction today. . . ."

Day after day the war drew nearer to Moscow. The suburbs were deserted; stock, lachphiol and tobacco plant were blooming in the gardens; and next to the flower beds aircraft defence forces were digging gun pits. The children's homes and schools began to be evacuated.

Troop trains were moving from the East; the men were gloomily and silently alert; at rare intervals a jest, laughter was heard. From the opposite direction trainloads of refugees moved slowly; the wife of a commander from Kaunas wore somebody else's dress, much too tight for her—she had run out of her house when the town was bombed and had no time to dress; near Byelostok an elderly Jewish woman lost her grandchild and for some reason she held the child's doll; at the smaller railway stations women lit bonfires, cooked food, infants wailed.

The first contingent of wounded were brought to Moscow. The nurses heard amazing tales of how the frontier guards had blown up tanks, and they repeated to each other the words the men uttered: "We'll do them in."... The loudspeakers now belched ominous communiqués and now merry songs, but the songs did not inspire merriment. And near the Pushkin monument boys were playing at "war"—they did not understand what "Smolensk direction" meant.

Looking at them, Lukutin felt an upsurge of rage: he recalled Richter. A fellow like that was capable of anything....

At the beginning of the war Lukutin sent his wife and daughter to the Volga. At first Katya refused to go:

"You are taking advantage of the opportunity to get rid of me, aren't you? ... But can you picture to yourself what life in Saratov will be like? ..."

He did not answer, he was afraid of irritating Katya. He neither loved nor hated this woman with the peroxide blond hair and fingernails looking as if they had been dipped in blood; she was a stranger with whom he had been thrown together by the caprice of fate. He tolerated her; he was too timid to alter his way of life; and besides he could not part with Paulenka. Lukutin's daughter was four years old, but it seemed to him that she was able to understand and soothe him; half in jest and half in earnest, he would say to Paulenka: "You are my friend!" He wanted his wife to leave Moscow only because he was anxious about Paulenka, superstitiously so—she was just the kind the fascists killed! ... In Lukutin's imagination, Richter's kindly eyes merged with the blood of Madrid and Warsaw, with something frightful, distorted, cruel. Katya's objections were shortlived; after a spell of duty on the roof she said:

"I am absolutely unfit for this sort of life...."

During the first days of the war Lukutin, like everybody else around him, lived only on communiqués, the stories of eyewitnesses and rumours; he slipped easily from hope to despair. Somebody told him that our forces had invaded East Prussia, and he believed it. Several hours

later he met a fellow employee who said: "My sister barely managed to get out of Vitebsk." . . . Lukutin was utterly bewildered and depressed.

It was a beautiful summer morning. After his wife's departure Lukutin rarely went home, he spent his nights at his office. He went out to get a breath of the fresh morning air. The street was still deserted; two workmen passed, then a motor truck with soldiers in it, an old woman grunting—she was carrying a heavy bundle.

Suddenly Lukutin heard a familiar voice: the voice of Stalin. He was astounded by the emotion in that voice, the anxiety and at the same time the confidence, the consciousness of spiritual strength that one who knows he is in the right feels when he has to pass through a most frightful ordeal. It seemed to him that Stalin was addressing him directly, that he was calling him "friend." How many times in the past had Lukutin asked himself in torment—am I an outsider? . . . But on this July morning he realized how closely bound he was with every house, with every word, with every passer-by; he felt the ground under his feet when that ground shook.

July was a sultry month. The communiqués were enough to drive one crazy—new directions all the time! Many of Lukutin's fellow employees were already at the front. The Moscow side-streets were unrecognizable—the children had vanished, the city was silent, like a wood from which the birds had flown.

One very hot day a company of Home Guards was marching down one of the saddened side-streets of the Zamoskvorechye District. They were singing:

*Give us machine guns,
To make us feel more gay. . .*

They sang out of tune, and they marched out of step—it was at once evident that these men were not accustomed to holding rifles, but pens, or compasses; among them were middle-aged men, very stout men, there were short men, tall men, ailing men, some suffered from asthma, others, with bloated faces, from heart disease, there were philologists and accountants, botanists and artists, stagehands, cashiers, bookbinders, librarians, carpenters, electricians, men of every possible profession. They had zealously studied the ABC of the art of war; the most difficult part for them was to march in step. Among them was Lukutin. He was calm now; even the communiqués depressed him less; he was no longer an onlooker, he no longer tried to guess what will be; he had become a part of an enormous war machine.

Weariness prevented him from sleeping at night; then he lay thinking, intensely, hurriedly, as if he wanted, before entering the first battle, to think out all that he had not understood during the long years of his life. He said to himself: To the young ones everything is clear—they are defending their ideas, their world. But I? . . . How many times have

I, in my heart, disputed with my fellow workers. . . . Why have all distinctions disappeared now? When I heard Stalin, I knew he was speaking for us all. Today we marched past a little old church. I am an atheist, but it is dear to me because of the birches, reminiscences of my childhood. Across the road there is a school, it was now a mustering centre—if we hold out, Paulenka will go to that school. . . . Yesterday old Zhuravlyov said that we were defending Russia. No, it is not simply Russia that is dear to me, but this living Russia of today. She has absorbed the past. But the past cannot absorb anything. . . . I may have criticized, I may have doubted, but now I see that I cannot live without this. . . .

He fell asleep, and next morning military training commenced; and he was glad—for the first time in his life he need not waver, need not argue with himself, he was now a soldier: if he was sent, if he were ordered—he would obey. He pictured war to himself clearly and distinctly: the general notes something on a map; the battalion commander passes the order onto the company commander, and he, Lukutin, crawls, shoots, stays in a trench.

Later on he smiled when he recalled these thoughts: war turned out to be different. . . .

They spent the night in Vyazma, in a small tumbledown cottage that was cluttered up with cane furniture, bundles and rags. The housewife had a gumboil; she gazed sadly at the soldiers and sighed. Lukutin looked at the icons and, pondering awhile, he enquired:

“You believe in God?”

She shook her head:

“Many people have hung them up now. . . . If the Germans come there will be less trouble. . . . But I would like to believe in something—it would make life easier. . . .”

“But don’t you believe in our people?”

She sighed:

“The Germans, they say, have machines for everything. . . . Their soldiers get chocolate. . . .”

Lukutin had a comrade with him—before the war Fedoseyev had worked at the Ball Bearing Plant, he was writing a letter to his wife, but on hearing the conversation he broke off and said to the housewife:

“You talk just like a woman. . . . Wait, we’ll come along on machines too—they’ll make your heart glad to look at them.”

The housewife sighed again: her tooth ached, and she was frightened—there will be an air raid, and then the Germans will come. . . .

When, before dawn, Lukutin and Fedoseyev left, she sobbed:

“Don’t let the Germans come! After all, you are ours. . . .”

These words haunted Lukutin; he recalled the woman’s eyes, sad and vacant, like those of a worn-out horse. . . . Fedoseyev is probably thinking about his wife. . . . Other men have—wives, parents, friends. . . .

But he has only Paulenka, he cannot write to her. She does not know where her Papa has gone. . . . She must be shielded, like that woman with the gumboil. . . . And he must think for all. And die for all. . . .

But suppose he funks? He regarded himself as a faintheart. Did he ever dare to oppose others, open his mouth at a meeting? He had been timid even with Katya. What will happen to him when even the brave lose their heads? . . .

At night the Germans bombed the village in which a battery was stationed. The flares turned night into day. Somebody swore:

"The skunks, look how many they've hung up!"

Lukutin lay prone on his stomach and dully asked himself: why am I so afraid? It's really astonishing! . . . Am I an exception, a miserable coward? . . . All my insides want to come up. . . . But I won't run away—I mustn't. . . .

Two days later he was in the very thick of it: it all happened very suddenly. Perhaps the General knew the situation; but the Company Commander had no suspicion that German tanks had broken through. True, they had been told many times that they need not be afraid of tanks, they had grenades and "bottles," the most important thing was not to lose your nerve, to wait until the tanks drew near. . . . When the Battalion Commissar said that, everything had seemed simple and not frightful at all. Nevertheless, the men lost their heads. Lieutenant Zhigach yelled:

"Where are the bottles? Shehegolyov says he sent them in the morning. . . ."

Lukutin found himself in a narrow wayside ditch overgrown with nettles, with him were—Fedoseyev and Levin. The bottles were beer bottles, and Fedoseyev tried to be witty:

"It would be nice if we had some lobsters. . . ."

Levin swore in reply. Lukutin said nothing. He was not thinking of anything, he only stared hard into the distance. How long have they been in this ditch? Lukutin mechanically glanced at the dial of his watch, but nothing was registered in his mind. He did not see, but heard, the approach of the leading tank. The rattling and clanging grew louder. Lukutin crouched still lower, the nettles stung his face. At this spot the road turned sharply. The tank slowed down. Lukutin saw a German rise out of the turret. Looks like an officer. . . . Lukutin straightened up and hurled the bottle. Everything was blotted out before his eyes, he saw nothing more.

Shooting. Lukutin again crouched to the ground. He felt no fear. He felt fear only in the evening when Lieutenant Zhigach said:

"I shall recommend all the three of you for an award."

Then Lukutin awoke out of his daze, he recalled the lean dark face of the German. That was death gnashing its teeth. . . . It was enough to make one a fatalist. Playing odds and evens with fate. . . . It was funny, but hellishly frightful. But if I am ordered to tomorrow—I will go again,

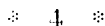
wait among the nettles. . . . There are no winnings for a man here. . . . Yes, there are—we shall win the war. . . . Later on we shall have more guns, fine guns, meanwhile, we have the bottles. . . . It's silly that they should be beer bottles. . . .

Fedoseyev was amazed: Lukutin, whose old-fashioned courtesy everybody used to laugh at, was standing in the middle of the road and swearing, swearing so hard that two passing despatch riders even gasped with astonishment.

"What's the matter with you, Pavel Sergeyevich?"

Lukutin smiled sheepishly:

"Nothing. . . . We're fighting."



"This is a man's business," Hannah was saying. "Poor Lyova, I suppose he's been killed. Now Olya will go. He understands and can explain to others. . . . But where are you going? . . . They have no time to bother with you. . . ."

Raya smiled absently in reply. At first she had accepted the hospital as something inevitable. She would have preferred a paratroops extermination battalion, of course. But she couldn't handle a rifle. . . . So she had resigned herself to the hospital. The main thing was—to get to the front. She could not picture what the front was like, she only felt that—there the heart throbbed, but here—the blood scarcely reaches here, the streets are growing cold, are dying.

On learning that Raya was going away with a military hospital Alexei Nikolayevich Steshenko, Valya's father, was indignant:

"Childish romanticism! Nobody needs her. . . . And besides, if you please, she is a wife, a mother—and forgets her duties. . . . It's a good thing Valya is with her husband. . . ."

Shortly before the war the parents had received from Valya a short but important letter in which she had informed them that she had married engineer Vlakhov and was happy. "What a misfortune," sighed Antonina Petrovna. "Now they will send him to the front, they don't give people a chance to settle down. . . ." But household cares prevented Antonina Petrovna from brooding over the matter, she bought flour, cereals and sugar, and made preparations for a hard winter. Nevertheless, she found time to run in to see Hannah.

"If I were you I'd forbid Raya to do such a silly thing."

Hannah made no reply. As if Raya would listen to her! She had told Naum that it was silly to go to Paris. He was killed there. When she had tried to point out to Olya that it was wrong to leave a young wife without protection, he had waved it aside. Only Alyenka obeys her. And only Alyenka is left to her. They will sit together evenings and wait

until this accursed war comes to an end. Why do people fight? Lyova came from Paris, he looked well, showed her a photograph of a gay-looking wife. That shows that he was doing well in Paris. And Osysa was doing well here. . . . No doubt the Germans, too, were doing well at home, people say they have lots of everything there, clean streets. . . . What do they want Kiev for? Why should people kill each other? . . . They're mad! Perhaps it's because people have forgotten God? . . . And Hannah tried to recall a prayer. But the unintelligible words got mixed up in her head. Raya had told her about the hospital: "The men say—make us well again, we'll settle accounts with them." . . . Antonina Petrovna had come running in shouting: "Wood, wood is the main thing, they won't heat the houses. . . ." Polonsky had come to say good-bye. He was in the River Flotilla. He mentioned Korostien: "The Germans are pushing on. . . ." They've gone mad, like Naum!

Raya kissed Polonsky simply and without embarrassment, as if neither temptation, nor struggle, nor that feverish night—the last night of peace, had ever been. When he had gone she thought to herself: how lucky I pulled myself up in time then! I feel at ease with him now. And I have written to Osip: "Remember, I love you, I will wait." . . .

A short letter arrived from Osip, written to Raya and his mother: "I'm going into the Army on active service tomorrow. We are all in high spirits. The fascist attack took us unawares, but the enemy has miscalculated, he will be routed." . . . Hannah read and reread the letter many times, and then went to see Steshenko:

"Osysa writes that the enemy will be routed. . . ."

Alexei Nikolayevich laughed irritably:

"I've read it. . . . You'd do better to stick strips of paper across your windowpanes, if they are smashed, you'll not be able to get others."

Hannah felt offended: how could Steshenko have read what Osysa had written? She had a clever son, he didn't talk for talking's sake, if he says that the Germans will be defeated, he knows. . . .

Vera Platonovna came to see Hannah.

"Borya is in Tarnopol. I am afraid he did not manage to get away. Where's your son?"

Hannah read Osip's letter. Tears appeared in Vera Platonovna's eyes:

"A good letter. It's true, we shall win, I remember the Germans. . . . They may have a lot of guns—but they have no hearts. . . . Yes, it is a fine letter! . . . Of course we shall win. And Raya—she's a brave girl! . . . If only we were younger. . . ."

She looked around, as if doubting that they were alone, and then put her arms around Hannah:

"We two can have a good cry. Nobody will be angry with us. . . ."

The hospital was leaving for the front. Raya took her daughter in her arms and suddenly felt a sharp pang of fear, she herself could not

understand why, she reproached herself—everybody was parting now. She restrained herself and calmly embraced Hannah, she said: "Don't worry, we will always be in the rear."...

On leaving, Raya again felt—fear!... She did not remember how she got to the hospital, everything was in a fog. But as soon as she got there, she pulled herself together; she lived only for one thing—her work.

Was this childish romanticism, as Steshenko had said? The hospital had long ceased to be a mystery to Raya. She knew now that hospital meant—the smell of carbolic, cots, barrels of plaster, bales of cotton wool, gauze stained with blood and pus, bedroom pots, bed pans, shrieks, the hoarse rattle in men's throats, men gasping for breath, the air impregnated with the smell of medicines and fever sweat, men writhing in the agony of death. Why did frail Raya, whom her family had petted, protected from petty troubles, find spiritual peace here?

Osip would have said it was proper upbringing, he would have been right and wrong. Raya was furious with the fascists, she loved her country, thirsted for victory; but all her friends, all her coevals shared these thoughts and sentiments, but not all of them tried to cross that thin, almost imperceptible, line, which in days of trial separates those who make history from those who accept this history like a storm, like fate. Raya possessed a vast stock of unexpended emotion, a desire to find her own road, a longing for real work. Her husband had not calmed her, her work had failed to satisfy her, there remained only dreams, and they had worn her heart away as water wears away a stone. She was the most ordinary woman in the world, moderately coquettish, moderately modest, according to her questionnaire—an office employee, in status—a beloved wife, the mother of Alya, ordinary habits—to go to the theatre, sigh a bit, and then light the primus stove, dream over an old novel—how wonderfully they lived, those fateful heroines—and an hour later tell her husband who was searching the chest of drawers for a pair of socks: "I'll darn them in a minute, although it's time for me to go to work," and, in passing, think to herself—times are different now, I am—a Soviet woman, I have equal rights, I have my own work.... In short, there were very many like Raya, and if she was conspicuous at all, it was because of her exceedingly long eyelashes. But she was haunted by a feeling of unsatisfaction, more than once she had thought to herself: Valya is all right, she will be an actress, some extraordinary man who's been everywhere has fallen in love with her.... Zina is absorbed in her work, and in any case it's no use comparing myself to Zina, she is an exceptional character. Galochka? Well, Galochka will grieve, weep and a minute later burst out laughing. I alone have not found myself.... I wanted to love as they did in the old novels, but it turned out to be so silly—I hindered Osip in his work. He's not a bad man, he's very good, but he does not allow himself to be loved.... I nearly yielded to

Polonsky, but that would have been—only for an hour, or a month—one can turn one's heart into small change that way. . . .

And so, in those days when the earth trembled, when bombs dropped on the city, and long lines of refugees who had fled from their long-inhabited, breath-warmed, beloved homes, wended their way across the long bridges, Raya now felt the ground firmly under her feet. It turned out that she was needed. Of course, Klavdia Ivanovna, or Sorokina, were far more experienced, but the wounded men said "Call Rayechka"—in some way she comforted them, perhaps by her inexperience, her shyness, the astonished look her long eyelashes lent her. An old sapper with a grey stubble beard begged: "Sit beside me, dear"; a lieutenant who looked like a schoolboy whispered sheepishly: "Raya from Raia. . . ."* He had gangrene; the surgeon said that his leg would have to be amputated above the knee; Raya turned away—there were tears in her eyes.

Sergeant Major Guzilov died in her arms. He looked at Raya with his feverish, burning and yet misty eyes, looked so expressively that she wanted to scream, to drive off death, to save him. Osip once had eyes like that. Long ago. . . . But Guzilov moved his lips: "Write Masha." . . . He did not finish, and the only thing Raya knew about his whole life was: somewhere there was Masha. After that he at once grew cold, stiffened; Raya released her hands with difficulty. She had never seen a man die before, it shocked her—because it was both simple and enigmatic. Why, only a moment ago he had asked for a drink, had worried—"Masha." . . . Now his face was austere, serene. . . . Death helped Raya to understand life anew: everything became nearer, dearer. She tenderly thought of Polonsky. Where was he? How was Osip? . . . She wanted to stroke his exceedingly stiff hair, to say something very simple and important. They had lived so many years together and she had not said it to him. . . . Perhaps he was now tossing in fever, saying: "Write to Raya."? . . . How was Alya? How was Mama? (That's how Raya always thought of Hannah.) There was a bad communiqué today. . . .

The hospital at which Raya served was near Poltava. Some nights bombers came over, houses burned. They brought in an injured boy. . . . Death became an everyday, customary affair; and more and more brightly there burned within Raya a love for life, for these white cottages, embroidered towels, the morning freshness, the nights, so dark and quiet that it seemed—here are you, there is a star, fly to it—nobody will see. . . . Formerly Raya had dreamed dreams, she recalled them when Osip woke her up just before dawn on returning from a meeting—she was in a gondola, sliding along the canals of Venice, or playing the piano in a vast columned hall, and people were weeping. . . . But now, when she found a sour guelder-rose berry she laughed with happiness—I am alive! I am living well, hard, rough like a carthorse, but living well. . . .

* Rai—the Russian for Paradise.

"Have you heard about Kiev?..."

Raya snatched the newspaper. Then she went to her patients; she did not say a word. That evening Captain Nikitenko died; he died in great pain, he wanted to get up, threw out his arms, he vomited blood. Raya remained with him to the end. She felt that she was dying with him: Kiev, my Kiev! ...

* 5 *

Dmitri Alexeyevich Krylov's vital strength was inexhaustible: neither hard work nor events could depress him. The hospital was set up in a wood. September was an exceptionally gorgeous month; it seemed as though nature, shocked by the imminence of death, wanted to squander her wealth. Flocks of birds in triangle formation flew across the exceedingly high sky at regular intervals. The smell of grass and of mushrooms pervaded the air. The sun solicitously shed its warmth upon people. The grey cabins on the high bank of the river spoke of the peaceful melancholy of children's games, betrothals, weddings and wakes, and the rowan tree added something—about the passion of the heart, about restless youth. And amidst this magnificence Dmitri Alexeyevich saw the frightful spectacle of national calamity. Day and night refugees streamed along the road; carts trundled past and on them old women groaned and frightened children cried; Junkers peppered the roads with lead. The Germans pushed forward, it seemed as though nothing could stand up against them.

On several occasions Dmitri Alexeyevich talked with wounded Germans; the prisoners behaved like victors; they were filled with the gaiety of frolicsome wild cubs; healthy, tanned, repressing their pain, they grinned.

"Devil take them, when will they get their deserts?" Dmitri Alexeyevich sighed to himself. And Commissar Bukov said:

"We have abandoned Dniepropetrovsk.... We have abandoned Tallinn.... They advance with music, as if on a parade ground—psychological attack.... Naturally, the nerves can't stand it."

"Nerves are for ladies," said Dmitri Alexeyevich flaring up. "If the Germans are psychopaths, why should we throw fits?"

"They are superior in materiel too—tanks, aircraft...."

Krylov did not know what to say in reply. In his own field he will not disgrace himself. Only yesterday he extracted from Sergeant Gorbunov's liver a shell splinter weighing eighty grams—what do you think of that? He saved Political Instructor Chirkess' leg, that Chirkess will dance yet, on my word of honour! ... As to how many tanks each side had, this Krylov did not know.

Bukov went on talking:

"They land paratroops on a large scale and at once organize all-round defence. They have dropped tommy gunners all over the place—the only thing our men are talking about is 'cuckoos.' They tear along on motorcycles—and this has a terrifying effect too.... There is an adventurist element about it, of course, but it inevitably has a psychological effect...."

"What, talking about psychology again? I know those colts. I can speak German, can't I? I have talked with them.... They can't even think."

"Perhaps that's the reason why they are advancing?"

"No, Comrade Commissar, pardon me! Do you want to say that—being idiots they are stronger than we are? Excuse me for saying so, but although you are a commissar you've got a fit of nerves. Who invented those tanks of yours? A man with brains, or an idiot? One can march without brains, but they won't march like that long...."

A wounded German was brought in. He was a young tanktrooper. When Krylov began to examine the wound—a shell fragment had grazed his thigh—the German trembled.

"Say, what are you afraid of?" asked Krylov.

The German said nothing. Then he confessed:

"We were told that the Reds castrate prisoners. Better kill me!..."

Krylov's face became flushed with indignation, but he restrained himself and dressed the wound.

"A skin wound. But you...." He waved his hand in disgust. "Your leg will be all right. It's worse with your head—it's an absolute vacuum."

The German did not understand and caught fright again:

"Are you a mental specialist, Herr Major?"

Krylov roared with laughter.

"Oh no!... But if you are worrying about your brains, a mental specialist won't help you. A veterinary surgeon may.... Whatever was your mother thinking about? Hitler is to blame for a lot, of course, but still, she might have given you some semblance of humanity...."

For a week or two the tension was eased. Our forces counter-attacked, forced the Desna. Several panicmongers were shot, order was introduced. The peasants who were hiding in the forests began to return to their homes. Krylov beamed: "I told you they won't be marching long!..." He received a letter from his wife in Atkarsk, and from Natasha in Moscow. They were alive and well, that was all right, one couldn't expect more at present.

Then things got gloomy again; every day Bukov reported:

"We've abandoned Chernigov... Romny... Kiev.... Where are they going to be stopped?..."

Krylov had to go to Orel for a day to obtain medicaments. He came back much encouraged and had a long story to tell the wounded:

"The Germans are lying, to listen to them one would think we have lost everything. But in Orel it's like before the war—shops, restaurants, kiosks. Girls strolling about. . . . Tramcars, real tramcars. . . . The main street is wonderful, gardens, cleanliness—just like the capital. . . . In the restaurants they sell port wine on tap, I didn't taste any myself, but I had a clean keg with me—I took some for my patients, it's a good tonic. . . . Now if Orel is like that, it must be wonderful in Moscow. Those colts will be galloping back soon. . . ."

He was able to infect everybody with his own bubbling cheerfulness. The sick men simply worshipped him. Commissar Bukov once said: "I shall have to take up the study of medicine, as things are it looks as though Krylov is my commissar." . . . Young surgeon Zabrodsky, who was morbidly impressionable, entered Krylov's tent and said:

"Dmitri Alexeyevich, I had to come to you—I simply can't. . . ."

"But I don't treat cases of 'simply can't,'" growled Krylov. "Especially in persons of the medical calling, so to speak. Why can't you? If it's Belyaev's high temperature, don't let that worry you—he'll pull through. . . ."

The autumn rains began. Nature, like the people, breathed sadness. On one of these grey, hopeless days Zabrodsky came running in and exclaimed:

"Dmitri Alexeyevich, it's begun! . . ."

"What's begun?"

"An offensive, along the whole front. The communiqué is awful. But there is no need to read it, it's enough to go out on the highway. . . ."

Dmitri Alexeyevich wanted to swear, but restrained himself—he never used coarse language, he merely muttered:

"The beasts, may they! . . ."

On seeing Zabrodsky's lip twitch he flew into a rage:

"Your nerves have gone to pot. You are supposed to heal others, but you are enough to make anybody sick. They have launched an offensive? So what? It means that the first act is not yet over. As regards the second act, you need have no doubt about what that will be like. Do you know our people? Or did you grow up on the moon? Our people are exceptional, I tell you. . . . They bombed us pretty heavily when I was still in Moscow and all our windows went flying. But next day a glazier came along, took careful measurements, cut panes, and put them in. Before the war I broke a window once and had to wait three weeks for a glazier—it was all 'tomorrow' and 'tomorrow.' . . . A bomb dropped outside the Manege—they patched the hole up at once. That's what our people are like—they show what they are made of when there's trouble. An offensive, you say? Never mind, we'll get into the swing. You'll see how they'll trundle back again. Meanwhile, let's go and have a look at Japaridze—his wound is healing too slowly. I don't like the look of it. . . ."

It was not easy for Krylov to talk in this cheerful way, his heart ached: Bad, very bad! . . . We built and built, and now those colts are wrecking everything. They've trampled down the corn. Killing children. Something unheard of. . . . But one thing Krylov was firmly convinced of: We'll pull through!

The fatal day arrived: there was a division—and now it was no more. The field telephone was silent. Commanders, men from different units—infantry, sappers, signallers, were streaming along the road. Firing from all directions. . . . Something very bad, there hadn't been anything like this before. . . .

Krylov stopped a commander whom he did not know:

"Where are you off to, Comrade Captain?"

"I've lost my unit. . . ."

"I'm not asking you what you have lost, but what you intend to do."

The Captain shrugged his shoulders:

"I don't know. . . . It looks as though we are surrounded. . . ."

During those days that word was on everybody's lips. Nobody knew definitely where the Germans were; sporadic firing, frequent raids by enemy aircraft, the roads jammed with peasant carts, burnt motor trucks and abandoned cars increased the confusion.

Krylov grasped the Captain by the arm:

"Since you have lost your unit, then be good enough! . . . We must get the hospital out of here. We can't leave the wounded to those colts. I am Military Surgeon Second Rank Krylov. You get the men together. Look at them straggling along, and all in the dumps into the bargain. I suppose they too have lost their units. But here we must find. . . I say we must find a way out—a way out. . . ."

There was such passion in his words that the Captain answered:

"We'll have a try. . . ."

"Pardon me, I forgot to enquire whom I am speaking to. . . ."

"Captain Zuikov."

Krylov himself went and stood in the road and stopped the men.

"Where are you hurrying to? You can't get out by yourself in any case. . . . I'm in trouble with the hospital here. . . . you've got a good face, you are a Soviet man, one can see that at once, you wouldn't abandon your wounded comrades, would you? . . . Right turn, a senior is in command, Captain. . . ."

Krylov swore at himself: "I've forgotten that Captain's name!"

They succeeded in mustering about two hundred men, not counting the hospital staff. When dusk fell they started out. Not far away a small town was burning, the carts carrying the wounded stood out distinctly against the glare. Tracer bullets, rockets—for a moment Krylov looked and admired: fireworks! But he at once checked himself—he must keep

a good lookout to see that they didn't scatter. That Zhukov or Saikov, whatever his name is—is soft. . . .”

Krylov concealed from the rest that he could barely drag his feet along: a severe attack of rheumatism. But Zabrodsky noticed it:

“Dmitri Alexeyevich, get into a cart.”

Krylov flared up:

“The carts, my friend, are for the wounded. When we get out of this encirclement, or whatever it is you call it, I'll dance such a quadrille that it will make you green with envy. . . .”

This was so unexpected—in the pitch dark forest, in the interval between two bombings—that even the wounded smiled.

They proceeded at night—in the daytime they hid in the forest, drenched, shivering with cold. They blundered into an ambush, won the battle; Germans held a village, had machine guns mounted on the roofs. Captain Zuikov turned out to be not so soft. The village was stormed and captured. Huts burned, the charred corpses of Germans lay around. Krylov hugged the Captain. They went on. When the fourth night flickered and paled, through the dense network of rain Krylov discerned soldiers in the distance.

“Now, Captain, take command. . . .”

But there was no need to take command, they were our men. Krylov gazed in astonishment—on the table there was backfat, honey, milk. A miracle! . . . But he did not manage to eat, he collapsed on the wide bed and slept until noon. He woke up, jumped out of bed, and stroking his thin but unruly hair, he hurried off to the wounded.

In the evening he said to Major Shvetsov:

“‘Surrounded.’ . . . But I ask you—aren't the Germans surrounded? They are surrounded by everything—our units, the inhabitants, and the forests. It's scandalous, of course, that we have to retreat. . . . The Commissar says it's all a matter of tanks, aircraft—I don't know. I'm not a strategist. . . . In my opinion, it is also a matter of ability. This is the only music they know, they learned to march when they were still in diapers. But we dreamed about something different. . . . Never mind, we'll learn. They came to us intoxicated, had swilled French champagne. Was there any real fighting in France? . . . They practically met with no resistance there. An engineer told me, he had been there—they are a brave people, but they went soft. Politics. . . . But I found a captain. Suchkov, I think his name is. . . . He lost his unit, that's bad, of course, but he collected the men, they got out themselves, and got the hospital out, and on top of that wiped out a score of Germans. . . . Why? Because he is—a Communist, he's got to think. Those colts push on without thinking. All right, they have an army. We have an army too. But this they haven't got, this is profounder, it means—even one man in the field is a force. If there's no commander nearby, I have a commander all the same—in my head. I can hear the voice of Stalin day and night, if I'm really a

Communist. . . . Do you know, Comrade Major, we brought four of those colts with us. They thought I was going to castrate them, the idiots! But we saved them not because they deserve it, but because we are Communists—that means something. . . . All right, if you have any vodka—let's have a drink, I haven't warmed up yet after this march."

At night, after making the rounds of his patients, Krylov sat down on the doorstep and lit a cigarette. A couple was sitting nearby; they didn't notice him. The soldier was pleading in a loud whisper:

"We surrender towns, we blow up bridges, but you refuse to yield! . . ."

"The towns you will take back. But I want happiness. I have a young man in the army. . . ."

Krylov was so moved by this that he could scarcely restrain himself from jumping up and kissing the girl: That's the kind they are! . . . He thought of Natasha and smiled—a good girl! . . . Where was Vasya now?

After that bombers droned for a long time, anti-aircraft guns barked, not far away a bomb burst. But Krylov sat there thinking—about Natasha, about this unknown girl, about the Captain (what's his name? I've forgotten, 'pon my word. I've forgotten), he thought vaguely about a huge invincible people.

"Alert!"

Krylov chuckled—ha-ha-ha! Night birds! And suddenly he burst into song:

Why circlest thou o'er my head, black raven?

No prey wilt thou find. Black raven, I am not thine. . . .

He became flustered: out of tune again! Sometimes I want to sing, but I can't, it's scandalous. . . .

* 6 *

Hannah's world resembled the world of a child; perhaps that was the reason why she felt so well with her little granddaughter. The events about which people around her talked, the hopes, successes and the grief of the people were her own family affairs; observation of small things and meetings with people served her instead of books. She had judged the country's development by the houses that were built, and which she had seen with her own eyes, by the smiles of her acquaintances, by the work Osip was engaged in. If a shop assistant happened to be rude to her, or if she saw a militiaman acting stupidly she would say to Raya: "Osya thinks they have been re-educated, but it's not so simple. . . ." She had grown up in a different world—a world of a terrible God who could not be placated even by fasts, of a terrible policeman—who could

seize and deport—a world of repressed hopes and domestic, everyday despair. Everything was mixed up in her mind: the words of ancient prayers and Osip's phrases taken, one would think, from a leading article, old beliefs, omens, and talk about five-year plans, planning and political intelligence. She herself did not know whether she believed in God. But she believed in Osip. Lyova had come, smartly dressed, cheerful, smiling, but she had felt pity for him, as she had felt pity for her departed husband. Raya read books, went to the theatre, played the piano, but Hannah knew that Raya wept quietly at night, as she herself had wept when her husband went away. And the weaknesses of other people too seemed intelligible to her (she would say to herself "mad, like Naum! . . ."). Osip alone amazed her by his confidence, fortitude and wisdom. She was a little frightened of him, and worshipped him: for her Osip's words were the truth. That was why she had remained calm when the city tossed about like a person down with typhus, when people who had tried to get out of the city came back shouting: "The Germans are near Borispol," when the windows rattled from artillery fire, which was drawing closer and closer. She would take her granddaughter on her knee and say: "Don't be afraid, it is—war." . . . Hannah knew that there was shooting in war, and the roar seemed natural to her.

It was a bright autumn morning; the chestnut trees were decked with gold. After the tumult of war silence suddenly set in. Hannah went out—I'll try to get some milk for Alyenka. . . . And suddenly she uttered a low shriek—Germans were coming down Saksagansky Street towards her. She had expected everything, only not this. Didn't Osys write that they would be beaten? . . . But the Germans came along, young, merry, laughing, chewing something as they went. She became flustered like a hen, shielded Alya with herself. One German caught sight of her, laughed and took aim at her with his Tommy gun; his comrades also laughed—it seemed to be an amusing joke to them. Hannah barely managed to reach her house. She sat down beside Alya and said: "That's nothing. . . . It was done on purpose, to entice them here. . . . Our men will come soon. Papa will come soon." She was comforting not her granddaughter, but herself. Alya was not even afraid; on hearing the music in the street she clapped her hands.

Late in the afternoon Hannah decided to go and see the Steshenkos—perhaps they knew when our men would come back.

Alexei Nikolayevich received her very coldly; she even asked him:

"Are you unwell?"

"No."

"I'm glad to hear that. This is not the time to fall sick. . . . Have you seen them?"

"I have. Perfect order. It's a different school—you can see that at once. Yes, and they have lived differently—without these 'experiments.' . . . As for ours. . . . What's the use of talking, they're played out. . . ."

Hannah didn't understand a word.

"Who are you talking about, Alexei Nikolayevich?"

"That's clear, not about you and me, but about the Communists."

Hannah pressed Alya to her breast; she could barely speak from grief and indignation.

"How can you talk like that?... Valya was in the Young Communist League with Rayechka, when she came back she said she had put in an application to join the Party..."

"Worse things than that were done under compulsion."

Antonina Petrovna intervened:

"You have no business to drag Valya into it.... Does a young girl understand anything about politics?..."

At first Alexei Nikolayevich had spoken reluctantly, but on hearing Valya's name mentioned he flared up:

"My daughter is absolutely innocent. You want to throw the blame on others, don't you? But that won't work! We did not go, we were driven."

"Who drove you?"

"People like your son. No wonder the Jews are so scared..."

Hannah got up:

"Let's go, Alyenka."

Antonina Petrovna felt embarrassed, she hurried out into the hall:

"Everybody's so nervous now.... Perhaps you are hard up for bread? I'll give you some, I had taken in a stock..."

"I'll never set my foot here again!" shouted Hannah.

She put her granddaughter to sleep, sat down by the bed, gazed at the childish face, bright and calm, and wept softly. We are alone.... Two orphans—one cannot even dress herself, the other, is on the brink of the grave. Who would ever think that Steshenko was a pogrom-monger? There was a time when people like that came along, broke windows, smashed up furniture and ripped pillows. They were ignorant, but he—he is a teacher, brings up children.... Perhaps Olya also merely indulged in fantasies, like Naum?...

Just before dawn she dozed, but was soon roused by Alya's merry twitter. Everything came back to her in a flash: the Germans, Steshenko.... The streets were quiet—our men had not returned.

There was a knock at the door. Hannah shuddered: is it those men with the guns?... It was Vera Platonovna.

"I barely got here—I was stopped four times. Oh what trouble!..."

Hannah felt better at once: they were not alone in the world.

She told Vera Platonovna how a German had wanted to shoot her:

"Just think of it—I was walking with Alyenka.... They are not soldiers, they are bandits!..."

"Brutes! As I was going to you just now, it's too awful to tell.... It was near the theatre.... Three Germans and one of ours, a jailbird....

They caught an old man and tore his beard out. I couldn't stand it: 'What are you doing?...' The jailbird answered—'He's a Jew.'... They've no consciences. They won't hold on for long. When our men were going away a commander said to me: 'Expect us back soon.'... Can brutes rule over men?"

"Vera Platonovna, I went to see Steshenko. You will not believe me... He shouted that the Communists and the Jews are to blame, I positively couldn't believe my ears..."

"I never liked him. Valya—is a good girl. But he—he's not straightforward, talks so nicely, but never looks you in the face... Don't go to them any more, Hannah Lvovna. If you have any trouble, take Alyechka and come to me. That jailbird shouted that the Jews will be evicted from their houses, and I thought to myself—it would be better if you'd come over to my house. You'll find it a bit crowded, but after all, it'll be quieter."

Hannah embraced her and promised to go over soon. When Vera Platonovna had gone Hannah thought to herself: "No, Osip was right. Steshenko—is a snake. But how many are there like that?... Vera Platonovna talks like Olya. Would Valya have talked differently? Or Borya?... The young ones are good, and they are fighting. That means, these brutes will soon be driven away."

Early in the morning, two days later, she was awakened by a frightful clamour. She ran into the street. Half-dressed people were talking about something in great excitement. Black smoke, dense, like a fog, was pouring from the Kreshchatik. Hannah smiled to herself: it's our men approaching the city. We won't have to suffer much longer now. She took Alya into her arms and whispered:

"Don't be frightened, Papa is coming..."

* 7 *

Vera Platonovna was sitting at home knitting. If Borya comes home, he will have it for the winter... As always, her room was spotless, as if she had only just had a thorough cleanup for a holiday. The bed with three pillows, piled one upon the other, and a piqué bedspread, the polished floor, reddish, as if it were flooded with sunshine. On the wall hung an enlarged portrait of Borya in military uniform—he had sent it to her from Tarnopol; next to it hung some old faded photographs—her late husband, her sisters, nephews. An ikon gleamed dimly in the corner: Vera Platonovna prized this ikon—"it used to hang at my Mother's."... Borya once asked her: "Why do you keep it? You don't believe in God, do you?"... She did not answer at once, after thinking a moment she said: "It doesn't interfere with anybody, does it?... I don't know what to answer you, Boryenka. I don't go to church, I don't

pray. But whether there is a God or not, I don't know. If there is, he is not in church, he is in the heart. . . ."

She knitted and thought to herself: How hard! I did not expect to live to see anything like this. . . . In that other war they also came, but still it was different, they looted, killed, but they didn't torture people in broad daylight. Where do such people come from? They cackle, shoot. . . . They are not human. Our men must be having a hard time—how many guns, machines and carts these others have! . . . We shall have to fight a long time, perhaps I won't see the end. . . .

She pricked up her ears. Somebody was shouting on the staircase: "I have nothing. . . . Don't touch! . . ." Somebody swore in German. Then came a knock at her door. She smoothed her hair and calmly opened the door. Three Germans entered. One of them—the senior—spoke Russian, brokenly, but he could be understood:

"Who here lives? Any Jews? Any soldiers? Any Communists?"

She shook her head:

"I am here alone."

"What nationality?"

"Ukrainian. From the village of Letki. . . ."

The Germans went to the chest of drawers and began to throw out the underclothing. Borya's exercise books, old letters tied up with ribbon, and then emptied the cereal bags on the floor.

The one who spoke Russian looked at Borya's portrait.

"Who's that?"

"My son."

"A Communist?"

Vera Platonovna answered firmly:

"You have your faith, we have ours. . . ."

The German did not understand what Vera Platonovna said, but her tone angered him. He snatched the portrait from the wall and tore it up.

"No son. Kaputt!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Vera Platonovna. "You ought to be ashamed to offend an old woman. Have you a mother?"

"Silence!"

In his fury the German trampled upon the portrait, the shirts, the balls of wool, the letters. Suddenly he caught sight of a picture postcard under the ikon—a portrait of Lenin.

"Communist? Take that!"

He gave Vera Platonovna a swinging blow in the face. She fell; her eyeglasses were broken, her face bled but she did not lose consciousness. She gazed at her torturer, and that gaze infuriated him. The two others left the room and ascended to the floor above. From there came shrieks and the tinkle of broken glass. The senior also made to leave the room, but suddenly rage again welled up in his throat. Old witch!

That's the kind that blows up buildings, shoots you in the back. . . . In a blind fury he ran up to Vera Platonovna and began to trample upon her as he had trampled upon the underclothing. Then he dragged her to the staircase, dashed her head against the steps and pulled her into the courtyard already dead. He stood over his victim for a long time swearing frightfully in a hoarse voice. The sky was lurid—Kreshchatik was burning. And the house, overcome by horror, shrieked until the morning.

* 8 *

When Hannah went to the market with Alyenka (that was on Sunday, a week after the Germans came) she saw a notice posted on the wall. Perhaps it is no longer permitted to walk in the street? . . . She stopped in front of a blue poster. It read as follows: "Jews of the City of Kiev and its environs. On Monday September 29, at 7 a.m. you must present yourselves with your belongings, papers and warm clothing in Dorogozhitskaya Street, near the Jewish Cemetery. Penalty for non-appearance—death."

She read this order several times. What are these brutes up to? . . . An elderly man stood next to her; Hannah thought he was well-disposed. She asked him:

"Can you make out what they're up to? . . ."

The man looked round furtively and went away. A woman nearby said:

"It's obvious. They are going to deport the Jews. . . ."

"Where to?"

"That I don't know."

Hannah slowly walked home. She had aged very much during that week, her head trembled, she could barely drag her feet along. Where can those brutes send us to? . . . No good can be expected from them, they won't care that she is old, or about this baby. . . . And winter will be here soon. . . . Hannah looked at Alya with tenderness and grief: What will become of the child? I will die—and she will have no one to fondle her. And she's so clever, so jolly. She should be playing, romping. . . . I have lived long enough, it is time for me to die. But Alyenka. . . . How to save the child?

She decided to go and see Vera Platonovna: "I'll ask her to take the child until our men come back. . . ." The door was opened by a strange woman who glared angrily at Hannah.

"She's not here any more. They took her away. . . . They've taken all the Communists away. What, don't you believe me? Go and enquire at the police station."

Hannah understood: now nobody would save them. She must submit to fate. Perhaps they won't send them far. . . . We'll manage to live

somehow. . . . There must be some decent people even among the Germans, and they'll take pity on the child. . . .

And Hannah made preparations for a journey. Alyenka's warm coat was torn, she must mend it, look through her little socks. I'll bake some flatcakes. . . . These domestic cares took her mind off her gloomy thoughts. Alya played for a while and then quietly fell asleep; as she dozed off she said: "Dolly Masha is coming with us, isn't she Granny? . . ."

In the morning Hannah began to pack, but seeing that the street was crammed with people carrying bundles, with carts and hand barrows, she realized that there was no need for her to hurry—it will be good if we get there by the evening. . . .

Lvov Street was completely jammed. People were riding on spring carts, others were on foot, plodding along. There were very many aged people, and many children. Hannah asked herself: "Where are the young people? . . ." And she at once remembered: the young people are fighting. All the people here are like me and Alya. . . . Two bearded old men were carrying an old woman on a blanket, she was paralyzed. A man with an artificial leg was pushing a baby carriage, in it an infant was smiling serenely. Children lost their mothers and cried. The old men prayed; and the mournful strains of Oriental chanting mingled with the wailing of women. Two girls walked with their arms around each other's waists, they were wearing their best clothes and tried to keep smiling all the time. Alya looked round frightened and tightly hugged her big doll.

Suddenly Hannah caught sight of Dr. Weinberg in the crowd, he had treated Raya and Alyenka. With difficulty she pushed her way towards him.

"Where are they sending us to, Doctor?"

He looked at her with his kind mournful eyes and bending over towards her he whispered in reply:

"To our graves."

She shrieked and clutched Alya.

"That cannot be! The child? . . ."

The doctor waved his hand, took off his spectacles; Hannah saw tears in his eyes.

It became more and more difficult to move forward: crowds came from Pavlov Street, from Nekrasov Street, from Dmitriev Street. Hannah had never dreamed that Lvov Street was so long. Why, they had only reached the market place. . . . German patrols were lined up on the pavement. Now and again Hannah heard disjointed phrases from the house gates, street doors, and open windows.

"Lord, how many of them! . . . Where are they sending them? . . ."

"To work, they say. . . ."

"It's terrible to look at! . . ."

"Sasha, don't be late for dinner..."

"I'll only run to the baker's..."

"Kreshchatik is still burning..."

Somewhere behind those lines of Germans, life went on... Alya could not walk any more, she cried. Hannah picked her up, but she had not the strength to carry her. Somebody said: "Put the child on this cart"... Hannah expressed her thanks. The old man who was driving the cart made no reply—he was muttering something. Perhaps he was praying? Or had gone out of his mind?... This was enough to drive anybody out of his mind!

Perhaps the doctor was exaggerating? He always did that... He said that Raya had pneumonia, whereas it was just an ordinary 'flu...

A woman who was walking by Hannah's side said:

"People say that they will send us to different small towns..."

Of course the doctor is exaggerating. They are brutes, but they can't kill little children. Hannah tried to cheer herself up, but her heart froze. No, this was not the road to life! Everybody was weeping, women were rending their clothes, old men were praying as before death. Whom are they praying to? ... Hannah recalled how she used to sit in the synagogue—up in the gallery. It was on the Day of Atonement, the old men prayed to God for mercy. After that there was a pogrom... If there is a God, he doesn't hear, he doesn't care—they are not his children...

And those Germans had shameless eyes, they looked on and laughed. But there, one of them has turned away, he is a brute, but it terrifies even him... Where are our men? Where is Osa? Of course our side will win, but when?... These brutes will torture us all to death...

Where were they? Still in Lvov Street... In that house over there Hannah's elder sister, Fanya, once lived, her husband was a tailor, they had a very nice signboard... When Hannah became acquainted with Naum she went to her sister, cried, and asked for her blessing, as if she were her mother. Naum was a kindhearted man, only he was crazy... When he went away she had a hard time with Osa. She worked as a washerwoman and later as a charwoman. But in spite of all, she put Osa on his feet. Lyova had an easier time, of course, but Osa has a clear head. He is respected, now, no doubt, he is—a commander... And he found a good wife. It's easy to say that Raya is capricious, all women are capricious, but she has a heart of gold. And she did right in going to the war, everybody must fight, since they are such brutes... Now I can understand why Steshenko tried to dissuade her. The snake! ... But Vera Platonovna—she is a real friend. I wonder what those brutes have done to her? Perhaps they have deported her too...

The highroad... She was here a very long time ago—when she and Naum went to Rosa's wedding. Naum had danced so comically. And

she too had danced—a Polka. . . . And now life was behind her. But Alyenka. . . . She must not leave Alyenka—she's only just beginning to live. . . . Where are we? It looks like Melnik Street. . . .

They had passed all the houses. All around was vacant land, here a hill, there a ravine, and sand, lots of sand. Everybody stopped: they were not allowed to go any further. Some people took a bite of food. Women pacified their children. An old man cried out: "You brought us out of the land of Egypt. . . ."

Dusk was falling when they reached the German barrier. Hannah saw tables on the trampled grass. Like in an office. . . . They were probably writing down where each was to be sent. . . . They were allowed to pass in small groups—thirty at a time. Next to Hannah were the two girls in holiday attire and the crazy old man, the one who had taken Alya onto his cart.

A German took Hannah's passport. She enquired:

"Do you want to check it?"

But he threw the passport to the ground and shouted:

"Don't talk! Your valuables!"

Hannah proffered her wedding ring and three silver spoons.

"Is that all?"

They were told to go on further. Another German yelled:

"Undress! Look alive!"

Hannah stood stockstill. The German struck her.

"Undress! Undress the child!"

Whatever are they up to! . . . Brutes! . . . Hannah began to undress Alya. The child cried:

"I don't want to bathe, Granny! It's cold, Granny. . . ."

Hannah snatched the child up in her arms and pressed her to her withered body, trying to warm her.

The old man took his coat off.

"Take your pants off! Look alive!"

The old man answered:

"I won't."

The German struck him in the face; the old man staggered, but did not fall; his eyes became bloodshot and in a shrill guttural voice he cried out:

"Be accursed, you, and your family, and your house, and your path!"

Another German ran up and crushed the old man's skull with the butt of his Tommy gun.

Alya cried:

"Granny, I'm frightened. . . ."

"Kill me, but spare the child!" pleaded Hannah.

"Don't talk! Forward! Look alive!"

The two girls undressed. The Germans looked at them with greedy,

vicious eyes. But the girls, smiling, stepped out and to the surprise of all, broke into song:

Arise ye starvelings from your slumbers. . . .

Hannah saw: a ravine. Her mind still grasped the words spoken by the woman next to her: "This is Bahby Yar. . . ." Then a German snatched Alya out of her arms and swung the child into the ravine. Hannah uttered a frantic shriek, but at once fell silent, turned round to the German and raising her arm high shouted:

"Osya will come! The Red Army will come! You will answer for everything, you brutes! . . ."

They were driven right to the edge of the ravine, and then—a round of tommy-gun bullets.

The Germans quarrelled near the heaps.

"I told you that watch was mine. . . ."

"You were talking about another one, I put this one aside. . . ."

He dropped several rings into his pocket. among them was the one which a long time ago the young, dreaming tailor had slipped on to the finger of Hannah, his blushing bride. . . . And here lay Alya's coat, Hannah had mended it yesterday. . . . Nobody wanted it. . . . Underwear, children's toys, women's handbags, crutches, prayer books, a hat with a large plume. . . .

* 9 *

It was a cold autumn. The rains set in. The deep trenches that resembled wells were filled with water. The men froze, sneezed, swore. Day and night bombs, shells, mortar shells. It looked as though the enemy had explored every inch of the ground. How long could one remain in such a hell? Osip shrugged his shoulders—the order was to hold on.

There had been no mail for a long time. But one day fate was kind and Serdenko, the regimental postman, came crawling up on his hands and knees. The water dripped from him. From the inside of his coat he drew joy for the men: bluish, yellow, grey envelopes, pages torn from school exercise books folded in triangles, and two newspapers—an army newspaper and a Moscow newspaper.

"Give me the *Zvezda*."

Osip knew that there were no letters for him. Where was Raya? Had they managed to get away? . . . He tried not to think about it, was afraid that he would become "sloppy," as he put it to himself. He didn't tell his comrades anything, they did not even know that their Commissar had a family.

They were a little afraid of Osip: he seemed too judicious, dry, he himself realized that: there was something wrong. What good am I as a commissar? The heart and soul of the battalion was Captain Byelogo-

rov, blue-eyed, dreamy, daring when it was necessary, and merry when that was necessary. The men talked to him about their personal affairs, told him about their wives, their children, their joys and troubles. And he himself was fond of talking about his Klava—even Osip knew that Byelogorov's wife was a student at the Conservatory, that they had married before the war and had intended to go to Alupka.

The men read and reread their letters and gave them to each other to read.

A large sheet of coarse paper. Large scrawling letters. This was Goryuntsev's mother, writing from her collective farm. "Good day, or perhaps, good evening, my dear son! I send you my sincere motherly greetings and inform you that we are all alive and well and hope to hear the same from you. Shura was called up, Marusya has given birth to a girl. We have taken in the wheat, but it's bad with the potatoes, we are short-handed, in Syzran they promised to send townspeople to help us. My dear son, kill those vipers for wounding my maternal heart! I send sincere greetings to your dear comrades and wish you all success in your army life."...

After reading this Osip wanted to say something very cordial, but he could not find the words, the words "advanced collective farm peasantry" whirled in his head; they were all right for a newspaper article, but this was a letter from a mother. . . .

Petritsky said excitedly:

"My wife writes that they are being evacuated to some place in Uzbekistan. I don't know how she'll manage. The boy is eight and the girl is five. . . ."

"It's a good thing they are going," answered Osip. "It's quieter there. And warm. . . . I haven't been there myself, but comrades have told me—melons, grapes, raisins. What are you worrying about? We are living in a state, aren't we, not in a forest with wolves. I have been to Pechora, the climate is far worse there. And yet people live there—cinema, young people dancing, families, they bake pies. . . ."

Hannah was not the only one who could be affected by Osip's confident voice. Petritsky calmed down; he showed Byelogorov a child's scrawl:

"'Dear Papa. . . .' That's my little daughter writing. . . . She writes well. . . ."

Lieutenant Zarubin came up to Osip:

"We are sitting here drenched to the skin. I won't talk about other things. . . . But what are they thinking about in Penza? They won't provide my mother with firewood. . . ."

This was not sentiment, here everything was clear. Osip forthwith wrote to the Penza City Party Committee—about Soviet patriotism, about Lieutenant Zarubin's bravery, and about the fact that in winter firewood was needed. . . .

Byelogorov was bubbling over with happiness and he felt he must share his joy with someone. True, he regarded Osip as a man free from the weaknesses with which other men are afflicted, such a one had certainly never been in love. . . . But Osip was sitting beside him and so he offered him the pale violet sheet of paper. One could tell without reading it that it was a letter from a young, smartly dressed woman:

"My one and only beloved,

"I don't know whether my letters reach you, but I think of you so ardently, so passionately that you must feel it. Don't worry about me, I try to live, the worst thing in the world is to get downhearted, but at night, when nobody sees me, I blubber like a fool into my pillow. You wouldn't recognize Moscow, it's in military uniform, like you. I was away from home for ten days, we dug trenches near (a word deleted by the censor), not being used to it, it was hard at first, and we were also bombed, but we finished the job. The Germans dropped idiotic leaflets, called us 'little ladies,' certainly unaware that 'little ladies' like me can play the violin and dig earth too. We may have to go away from here, but don't worry, in times like these everybody must do their bit. If you can fire a rifle why can't I work in a collective farm? The main thing is—to win the war, although the news is not very bright. I am, for some reason, convinced that this will be soon. I recall every day, every moment I spent with you. Do you remember the Moscow Sea, and how you fell into the water, and then in the evening? . . . I can't write about it, you know what I mean. I kiss you as I did that time, and if the war lasts a hundred years I will wait, wait, wait!"

Osip's face became overcast with gloom: the letter reminded him of Raya. Perhaps she too had succeeded in getting away, was digging trenches, or working in a collective farm? But suppose they were left stranded in Kiev? . . . No, he must not think about that!

He was reading a leading article to the men: "To Hold Moscow—Is the Paramount Duty of the Soviet Soldier." He liked the article, it was all so plain and clear. He looked up—the men were listening, saying nothing. For some reason he again remembered Raya. . . . She had said: "You don't understand anything, not a thing." . . . Perhaps it is true that he does not understand anything? Last time Byelogorov had said: "Good, but rather dry. . . ." And Osip went on to say:

"The commander's wife writes that Moscow is now on a war footing. Like it is here. She is studying music and must take care of her hands, but she went to dig trenches. . . . So we must hold on, Moscow is not just a defence line, it is this. . . ."

With an awkward gesture he pointed to his heart and thought to himself—how silly, like in a novel. . . .

This was a short breathing space—between two German attacks. They had been here nine days. A small river. . . . Is that a defence? Even a child could wade across it. On the very first night the men dug deep

trenches with very narrow openings—you could scarcely squeeze through. The Germans attacked twice a day. There was not a whole spot anywhere around—crater edge on crater edge. But the worst was the shortage of ammunition—it was difficult to bring up. Byelogorov and Osip decided to let the Germans draw nearer—"economize." Byelogorov had asked: "Will the men's nerves stand it?" Osip had not even replied—this was war. . . .

Yesterday Zarubin had asked Osip:

"Aren't you really afraid?"

Osip flared up:

"Well, suppose I am? Why must I report it to you? The task, I think, is clear—to hold on. A man feels lots of things, but he's not obliged to advertise it all. If a man eats too much cucumber and gets diarrhoea, they don't write novels about it, they write about something else. . . ."

He glanced at Zarubin's ashen, haggard face and unexpectedly added in a kindly tone:

"It will pass. It's all nerves. I had a toothache once, the dentist put something on and it hurt even worse, but later it really did pass off. He said: 'I deadened the nerve.' . . . It's best not to have any nerves here. We'll be here awhile and stop feeling. When we get back home—there'll be the wife, nerves, and everything else you like. . . ."

The Germans decided to bring in aircraft. It was late in the afternoon. The sky cleared somewhat, its edge was a murky red. Osip counted: thirty-four. . . . Then he stopped counting. In the old days they must have pictured the end of the world like this: the ground heaved. . . . How many aircraft have those bastards got? For some reason he recalled a pamphlet he had read: Ruhr, Essen, the struggle for the distribution of raw material. . . . Then everything became dark, as if he had received a swinging blow in the chest. He came to when Goryuntsev, his arm round his shoulders, shouted:

"The Commissar's killed!"

"Give me a drink. I'm thirsty. . . ."

He took a sip and felt he wanted to vomit; he did vomit. His head ached terrifically, he wanted to get up, but staggered, and at once lay down again. For a moment it seemed to him that he was at home, sick, Raya brought him some hot tea and aspirin. The headache would pass off soon. . . .

"Feeling bad? . . ."

That was Zarubin, it sounded as if he was far, far away. . . .

"It's nothing, it'll pass off soon."

"Byelogorov. . . . Killed outright. . . ."

"What? . . ."

Osip jumped to his feet.

Byelogorov was unrecognizable—so mutilated was he. Osip stood

there, moved his lips—he wanted to say something, but could not. Making an effort he said:

“I take over command of the battalion.”

At night they buried Byelogorov. They could not find a board, so Osip scraped on a tin can: “Cpt. I. A. Byelogorov. Died like a hero. 12/X 1941.” A rifle volley was fired. The Germans retaliated by sending up rockets. Osip recalled how Byelogorov used to dream: “When the war’s over I’ll go to Alupka with Klava.”... He had a good face, fine eyes—merry, wise. . . . He must write to Klava. “I will wait a hundred years.”... Osip was glad it was dark, nobody could see him, he was sure his face showed how sloppy he had become. . . .

“Communication is cut,” said Zarubin. “Nothing to wait for now. We must retreat.”

“I’ve received no order to that effect.”

“But the ammunition is almost gone. And tomorrow they will come on again. . . .”

“The order was—hold on.”

“What’s this—obstinacy? . . .”

Osip smiled:

“Listen. . . . I am obstinate, it’s true. My wife used to say: ‘I can’t live with an obstinate man like that.’ . . .”

Because the Commissar mentioned his family for the first time Zarubin, and the others too, somehow felt better. A smile lit up everybody’s face. And now Osip said in a grave tone:

“Do you think we are the only ones to have casualties? Look what’s going on on the other bank. They take their dead away at night, but they dare not go near the river. There are at least fifty of them lying there. They won’t push on to Moscow any more. If we retreat only because they are pushing, they will push on to your Penza.”

The attack—the eleventh or twelfth, Osip had lost count—was launched early in the morning, just at dawn. The landscape was cheerless: rain, shattered trees, the pitted ground, the yellow turbid river. But it seemed to Osip that here precisely lay the heart of the vast country. We are clinging to this, and here we’ll stay! . . .

The Germans were allowed to come within two hundred metres; then machine-gun fire was opened on them. And for the eleventh or twelfth time the Germans reeled back. Osip counted: another forty. . . . If it’s like this everywhere, they’ll never see Moscow.

And again the sky was in a turmoil. Scandalous, where are our fighter planes! But for all I know—things may be worse with our neighbours on our flanks. Or perhaps our side is counter-attacking? . . . But one thing is clear: we must hold on. If we are men, real Soviet men, we’ll stand fast. But Klava is waiting for Byelogorov. . . . Where’s Raya, Alya, Mama? . . . No, I will not think! Better count the bomb explosions—it’s a calmer job. . . .

Keller glared angrily at the familiar scene: streaks of rain, yellow greasy mud, the stoves and chimneys of gutted houses, mutilated trees, and in the distance that rotten little river. Yesterday Lieutenant Krause had said: "We crossed the Dnieper, but we are stuck here in front of this lousy little puddle."... This time Krause had been right, but he is a bad officer—a bully, unfair, hands out Iron Crosses to his favourites, and no sooner does he set eyes on a man with the least bit of intelligence than he begins to find fault with him.

What evil genius created this country? It is impossible to live here. . . . Homesick. Keller recalled the banks of his native Neckar, the neat cottages, the gardens, flower beds and arbours overgrown with ivy or vine. And France. . . . Only now did he realize how happy he had been in France. One can, of course, laugh at the French—they have degenerated, they are making no progress, but after all they are a civilized people. In France you can't get the comforts Germans are accustomed to, but the French have their merits, they are witty, elegant and pleasant in company. And the main thing—they receive us well. Mimi, no doubt, had lied, she must have gotten those bruises from another man. . . . All the time I was there I received a bad reception only once. But Dumas—is a narrow specialist, he is over sixty and cannot understand that everything in the world has changed. It's a good thing I did not report him to the Gestapo—a German must be magnanimous. And besides, there is such a thing as professional esprit de corps. . . . Why recall that? How pleasant it was in Dijon! And Mimi. . . . How much would he give for one night with Mimi! Since the spring he had been living like a monk. . . . It would be good to get leave and go home to Gerda. Of course, it was useless dreaming of that now, we must take Moscow. And this miserable little river. . . .

The Führer said that the main forces of the Reds had been annihilated; he knows what he is talking about. We see only what's going on under our noses. But there's one thing I can't understand: the further we advance the more difficult it becomes. . . . In France the opposite was the case, men who were there relate that at first the French tried to put up resistance and even counter-attacked. But our regiment did not have to fight. . . . Where do the Reds get so many soldiers from? Krause says that they have no tommy guns. That doesn't make it easier for us—they rattle machine guns. . . . They are like ones possessed! They surely must understand that their game is up. What, then, is the use of resisting? Moscow is practically within arm's reach from here. Obviously, we shall get there. They have let us in for a frightful slaughter only to get a month's respite. When the French realized that we held all the trumps they threw in their cards, that's natural, that's what every civilized player does. But the Russians really are savages, it's enough to look at their roads. . . .

During the first days of the Russian campaign Keller had tried to restrain his comrades who fired through windows, broke down doors and dragged out young girls: "We must show them what German magnanimity is like." He even handed out candies to the children. Recalling this now, he laughed. Gerda is right: I am incorrigibly naive. It is enough for an old woman to burst into tears, or for some girl to smile, for me to do a silly thing again. . . . Yesterday they killed Kurt Schramm. He was a student of philology. He might have become a world-renowned scholar. But he was shot by an Asiatic who does not even know what a university is. Candies. . . . No, what they need here is the knout. They must be kept in curb until they are tamed! . . . In fifty years' time, perhaps, it may be possible to talk to them like human beings, but not before.

A year ago Keller had lived peacefully in Dijon; he had regarded himself as a seasoned soldier—after all, he had been under fire. But now he was a real frontliner. Kurt had died in his arms. Kurt was not the only one—they had lost a third of their company near this damn river. Yesterday Keller had found a louse on himself; it made him sick, and then he thought to himself: now this is real war—blood, mud, and horror! No time to think of Mimi here. . . . Perhaps his buddies were right in raping Russian girls. You can't expect them to offer them bouquets. . . . War has its laws: sometimes you want to relieve your feelings, burn, wreck, throttle. Gerda wouldn't recognize me now—I've grown wild. . . .

There were all sorts of men in the company—peasants who talked about morgens, fertilizer and the milk yield of cows, there was a music teacher, a businessman from Halle, and students. Keller had taken a fancy to Corporal Willi Weber, a lad with a delicate, almost girlish, face with the cruel eyes of a soldier who has seen things. Weber might have been called handsome were it not for his Adam's apple, which swelled when he got excited. In the company Weber was regarded as a daredevil. Before the war he had been a student in Jena and had pleasantly surprised Keller by his erudition; he quoted Schopenhauer, Chateaubriand and Dostoyevsky, knew by heart whole pages of Nietzsche, but he was by no means a dry bookworm—he was fond of a drink and a bit of fun, and when they were resting he knew how to make himself comfortable better than anybody—Keller knew that if you went with Weber there would be chicken, cream and a soft bed. Looking at Willi, Keller would think to himself: Professor Dumas can never understand us, here we have it, the new race—a soldier with a book, the scholar with a gun!

"I am dreaming of the time when the war will be over," confessed Keller to his young friend. "Of course, to build the new Europe, a lot will have to be destroyed. But the day of victory will come. . . . We shall return to our books, to our families. . . ."

Weber laughed:

"You have in you strong survivals of the nineteenth century. Somebody called it the 'silly century,' and quite right too. Freedom for ignoramus, the cult of tolerance and at the same time of *maisons de tolérance*, dreams about a modest sufficiency, the lamb of pacifism, in short, nonsense, rot. We have been born for something different, this will be a German age. Listen, Johann, without tragedy there is neither biography, nor the history of a nation. When the Dutch were able to fight they had Rembrandt. What have they got now? Cheese? . . . In the old days my father was the steward of a large estate almost on the frontier of Bohemia. There was a pond there with carp. I remember an ichthyologist from Dresden visited the estate and said that if a few pike were put into the pond the carp would grow bigger. People degenerate when there is no danger. The French didn't want to fight—they had grown fat. Actually speaking, we are their benefactors, we've taken some of their fat off, perhaps the capons will remember that they were once Gallic cocks. Do you think the Russians want to fight? They are being forced to do so. There is not a single individual here, they are—like this field, enough to bore you to death, naturally we beat them. For us war is not a calamity, but the highest manifestation of the human spirit."

Keller did not argue with him. True, he kept to his modest dream—a cottage. Gerda, coffee with cream, books; but in his heart of hearts he realized that Weber was right, that boy expressed the quintessence of the age.

They were given a day of rest: the regiment received reinforcements. A dreary, muddy village, the frightened faces of old women.

The men dried their greatcoats, roasted potatoes; sang songs they had known in their childhood. It was warm and cosy. Weber had managed to dig up a bottle of Russian vodka; they drank it in small sips to make the pleasure last longer. Keller was sitting and dozing. Visions of Mimi hovered before him. The little she-devil, it's only in France that you can find them like that! . . .

Suddenly there was a crash of broken glass: somebody had thrown a stone through the window. They all jumped to their feet and snatched up their tommy guns. Accursed country, you've always got to be on the alert! Weber ran out—into the darkness and rain. Several moments later he dragged in a flaxen-haired boy. The boy was howling frantically. Close-cropped hair, protruding ears, bramble-scratched hands—there were lots like him in Heidelberg, only there they were cleaner. . . .

Nobody understood what the boy was saying, but he kept on talking without stopping. Weber's eyes became still more cruel and his Adam's apple appeared. He held the boy tightly and suddenly—nobody expected it—he dashed the boy's head against the stove.

Keller turned away. After all, it's disgusting! To make war on children. . . . Then he recalled how Kurt had died. And that stone had flown right over Willi's head. . . . Savages! You can't apply our standards

to them. He asked Weber for a little more vodka, gulped it down, and at once fell asleep.

When he woke up the boy was no longer in the hut; his buddies were shaving, cleaning their boots, making coffee; Willi was reading the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius.

Again fields, mutilated trees, mud. Krause said: "If we don't force this idiotic little river we shall become a laughingstock. Because of us, the others can't advance."... Weber answered: "It hasn't been entirely our fault; the regiment has now received reinforcements. I am convinced we shall be on the other bank tomorrow."

* 11 *

The Germans were thrown back once again. Medical orderly Varya heaved a deep sigh as she dressed Osip's arm: a mortar shell splinter had entered it just above the elbow. Osip winced, but tried to smile.

"I'm afraid the bone is affected," said Varya. "We'll have to send you to the battalion base."

"No, it's not.... And besides, it's the left arm, it's not important. I can't go away, the show is only just beginning. We captured one of them alive. Insolence—tried to wade across.... Don't go away—they'll bring him in in a minute.... It's a good thing the interpreter got stranded here...."

For the first time they were to see a live German, they were all agog with curiosity. The only scowling face among them was that of the interpreter Zeldovich who, before the war, had been a student at the Pedagogical Institute. He had been sent here about a week before to interrogate prisoners; but there were no prisoners, and it had been impossible for him to get back to the regimental C.P. Zeldovich forgot about being an interpreter, sat in the trench with a rifle, and swore like a trooper, in Russian, of course. He felt far more nervous now than he had been during air raids. He had studied German poetry, but no sooner had he arrived at Divisional Headquarters than he was completely bowled over by questions like: "What's the German for parallel roads? Concentrated fire? Interaction?" Obviously, he had not met with such words either in Schiller's or in Heine's works.

Willi Weber cut rather a miserable figure—he was drenched and had an enormous bruise on his face (when he was caught he tried to get away). He scowled at everybody; his eyes were still cruel and even expressed arrogance, but there was something feverish in the hurried manner in which he turned his head from one to another, and in the intensity with which he listened to the unintelligible language.

Osip said to Zeldovich:

"Ask him—what unit?"

Instead of answering Weber shrieked:

"The Red Army is routed. Your generals are surrendering. I call upon you to surrender. In the name of the Führer.... We won't hurt anybody."

Zeldovich became flustered: they won't believe it, they'll say—I don't know the language....

"Comrade Commissar, the prisoner is talking utter bosh!"

"Translate what he said."

Zeldovich translated—word for word. Osip looked sternly at Weber.

"If he wants to cast aspersions upon the honour of the Red Army he hasn't got long to live."

Zeldovich liked those words, he said to Weber: "You haven't got long to live."

Weber shut his eyes. The Adam's apple on his long neck quivered. Sweat broke out on his face. He wanted to say something, but only a hoarse screech came from his throat. Then he opened his eyes, looked at Osip in horror and screamed:

"Don't shoot me! I'm a conscript. I obeyed orders. I am a student, I have a mother in Jena...."

Osip's lip curled with disgust:

"Tell him—nobody intends to shoot him. He must behave decently. there's no 'führer' here, we are human. What regiment?"

Weber sprang to attention; answered at length—Zeldovich couldn't keep up with him. When the interrogation was over Goryuntsev stepped up to Osip:

"Comrade Commissar, will you permit me to finish this skunk?"

"No, he's a prisoner. Don't be disappointed, you'll meet them in action yet.... But this one must be taken to the C.P. He is a Non-Com, and a talkative one at that. They'll interrogate him better there. Take the interpreter with you and go along, on all fours.... Together you'll get him there all right. Only take care—you've got to get him there alive. Do you understand?"

They reached the village where the Regimental C.P. was posted. Zeldovich went to his quarters. The adjutant told Goryuntsev that the Major was busy and that he would have to wait. Goryuntsev sat down on a log and pointing to it said to the German: "Sit down." And although Weber did not understand Russian, Goryuntsev began to talk to him:

"You are a skunk, a real skunk! Why did you barge into our country? Ukh, you red mug!... Were you having a bad time of it at home? Parasite! You come here, burn houses, torture people. I won't touch you, don't be afraid.... Our Commissar's got a head on him. Only there's one thing I'll tell you—you are the lousiest bastard!..."

Goryuntsev took out a scrap of newspaper and a tobacco pouch, rolled a cigarette and lit up. Then he gave the pouch to Weber.

"Smoke, you parasite. I would slaughter the whole lot of you. . . . But since you're going to live, you've got to smoke. Although you're a parasite, I know you want to smoke. . . . Smoke, I tell you."

Weber coughed from the unaccustomed smoke of the makhorka, but he cheered up at once: he realized that he would be allowed to live and, not thinking of anything, smiled at this gift of life.

Osip sat down to write to Klava. He sat a long time over the blank sheet of paper and at last wrote: "Dear comrade and friend Klava, Ivan Alexeyevich told me a lot about you, I know what a heart you have got. Be prepared, Klava. . . ." He put his pen down—no, it doesn't sound right. Only authors can write this sort of thing. . . . Perhaps I'd better ask Zarubin? . . .

Petritsky came running in:

"Communication's restored. Major Krapivtsev is on the wire. . . . And the Germans are coming on again, look at the fireworks. . . ."

Osip snatched up the receiver.

"Yes, that's me. I suppose the interpreter has told you. . . . The main thing is ammunition. You are asking about the Germans? They are coming on again. I can't hear. . . . We? . . . We're all right, we're waiting. . . ."

* 12 *

It was stuffy in the bomb shelter. The dim bulb scarcely lit up the large cellar with its passages and niches crammed with people. Some slept, others sat listlessly, yawned convulsively, listened to the rumble of explosions. One old woman was passionately embracing an enormous bundle. A pregnant woman was sobbing loudly. Nina Georgiyevna tried to calm her:

"Don't be frightened. That's not bombs, that's our anti-aircraft guns. . . ."

Somebody whistled:

"Gee! That was close!"

The woman sobbed still louder. Nina Georgiyevna would not be discouraged:

"I assure you it's the anti-aircraft guns. You must keep calm. The 'all clear' will be sounded soon."

She put her arms around the woman and the latter quietened down.

In such moments Nina Georgiyevna was conscious of a profound spiritual serenity. Just before the war Olga had said laughingly to Sergei: "Mama is like Lermontov's sailing boat—seeks the storm." . . . With the exception of her girlhood, Nina Georgiyevna's life had not been what she had wanted it to be. During the Civil War she had

been tied to her sick husband who, lying in a freezing room, wrote about British imperialism. It seemed to Nina Georgiyevna then that life was passing her by. Then came her bereavement, the red hearse, speeches, small things that daily reminded her of her loss—a worn cigarette holder, newspaper clippings, old letters. Then she was taken up with care for the children—a pair of shoes for Olya, preparations to send Vasya to the Pioneer camp, mending the worn-out elbows of Seryozha's coat. . . . True, she had her work—the school, the Institute, Party meetings, lectures on the five-year plans, Seryozha's stories, but that had not been enough—she had wanted to give everything. But now she had forgotten the sorrow of lonely evenings, of eternal doubts (does anybody need me, an old, sick woman?), she was living the life of Moscow. She would go to the District Party Committee like a soldier going to the commander's point: she waited for orders. No matter where she was—in the bomb shelter, at the railway station, in the hospital, everywhere she comforted people and imbued them with her own confidence.

Sometimes, in the middle of the night, she wanted somebody to comfort her: she had received no news from Vasya since the beginning of the war. Many times she made Natasha repeat the story of how she had parted from Vasya in Minsk. People said that there were large detachments in the forests. . . . But perhaps he was killed? . . . Now Seryozha has gone, writes rarely, assures her that he is in the rear, tries to calm her. . . . Nina Georgiyevna tried to reason with herself: the post was working badly, it was necessary to transport the wounded, shells, refugees—there was no time for letters. Obviously, they go astray. . . . And Vasya was never fond of writing. When things get easier he will write. . . . Seryozha wrote in September. . . . But she could comfort everybody except herself. She dreamed frightful dreams. A ship was sinking, Vasya was on board that ship. Seryozha was lying dead in the square of some foreign city. She would wake up in horror, take a drink of water, and then scold herself: You've let yourself go, nerves. . . . The sea—in Minsk! . . . Seryozha was still in the rear—his unit was still being formed. . . . But in spite of that her heart ached. And then she went to others and forgot her own pain.

Formerly she had often seen her daughters-in-law. One day Olya had asked her: "Whom do you like best—Valya or Natasha?" Nina Georgiyevna was unable to answer. In different ways she loved them both. With Valya she could talk about art, books and dream. Nina Georgiyevna understood Seryozha's choice: Valya was refined, tender, one rarely met a girl like that. But Natasha was still a child to her, she fussed around her as she had formerly fussed around Olya. This offended Natasha somewhat, but she thought to herself: it gives the old lady pleasure, let her. . . . The first to go away was Valya—she left in August. Natasha signed up for a course of instruction, she wanted to become a medical orderly. She was sent to Ryazan. Nina Georgiyevna gave her some

chocolate and cookies for the journey and sighed: "You are far too young."...

Olga remained. But, as always, there was a wall of misunderstanding between them. Olga talked about ration cards, food stocks, related that somebody had congratulated Labazov: "A splendid leading article."... Perhaps she spoke about these things in order to distract her mother from her gloomy thoughts; but Nina Georgiyevna would frown: what was Olya thinking about?

Nina Georgiyevna could not recognize Moscow; anxiety was written not only on people's faces but also—on brick walls. Many buildings were camouflaged, they were covered with a sinister rash; poisonous trees loomed green on bare walls; the sight of them caused the heart to shrink. In the squares toy houses sprang up as in a fairy tale. The face of the Moscow River was covered by a motley veil. Nina Georgiyevna felt the tragedy of this masquerade with exceptional acuteness when she heard a small boy lisp: "Mama, there's a fir tree on that little house, Jack Frost is coming," and in answer his mother burst into tears.

The streets were crowded, restless. Women lugged bundles, bales and suitcases. Crowds constantly surged at the railway stations. Towards evening barrier balloons, resembling whales, rose slowly into the low, grey sky; people crowded the entrances of the Metro. The nights were dark and noisy: sirens, anti-aircraft guns, bombs. After a few warm days an early winter set in. Alarming rumours came creeping in about Orel, about Vyazma, about Mtsensk. Moscow had long forgotten the calmness of peace, but had not yet found the calmness of the soldier. Everywhere people talked about evacuation. Many houses were deserted. Nina Georgiyevna's neighbours went away too.

Olga came:

"You may congratulate me, we are being evacuated."

She was unusually excited. Nina Georgiyevna began to calm her.

"And a good thing too, a newspaper like yours is more needed deep in the rear. But don't take it to heart, Olya, they won't take Moscow, I am convinced of that."

"That's my opinion too. The Germans gave it over the radio that they would be on the Red Square on the twentieth, but that is their typical boastfulness. Have you heard anything from Seryozha?"

"No."

"Have you definitely decided to remain, Mama? It's childish, in my opinion..."

"Until they tell me... There's lots of work to do here."

"I think they will send you away too. At your age, you know... But it will be easy for you—you haven't many things. I positively don't know what to do, we have an awful lot of things, we can't take them with us, but it is a pity to leave them—they'll be stolen."

And again Nina Georgiyevna was conscious of a feeling of estrange-

ment, almost of dislike. At a time like this Olya thinks about a lot of junk!

Olya felt offended: "Mama thinks that I suffer less than she does. Absurd! As if I were not a Soviet woman. But it's a pity to abandon the things."

They parted coldly, like strangers.

Two days later Nina Georgiyevna was told: "It is necessary to evacuate a group of children—their parents are remaining here. You are the one to manage that job..."

Nina Georgiyevna took a last stroll through the streets of Moscow, she walked slowly amidst the sleet and smiled sadly. This was the house she had lived in at the time when she was arrested. The policeman came, stamping his heavy top boots, and gazed long at a photograph—a group of high-school students, and said: "We'll take this..." During the past few days her mind had been filled with recollections of years that had long passed away. She clearly visualized her comrades of the underground, the secret meeting places, the hectograph, the leaflets, the prison cell, the red-haired gendarme captain who had interrogated her, the inn in the Polish township, bundles of newspapers... As if it were only yesterday! But everything after that was enveloped in fog. Perhaps that was to be explained by her age—I'm getting old, people remember their childhood and early youth more distinctly than their years of maturity. Or perhaps the dramatic events that were taking place stirred Nina Georgiyevna's soul and revived in her the rebellious girl of years long past.

Just now she remembered how she was adopted as a member of the Bolshevik organization. Comrade Yegor had looked at her distrustfully (it had seemed to her that he could see her through and through): "Will you funk?"... She had answered: "No." She had felt sad in the Butirskaya Prison; when she heard the distant clang of tramcars she would sigh: "How good it is to be free! Even the pigeons seem to be celebrating something out there..." Now she even felt tender towards the Butirskaya Prison. It was hard to leave... But the comrades know... Everybody must be at his post.

And so they were in a dimly lit railway station. An air raid. Long trains. So dark, you couldn't see anything... She called out the names of the children: "Suppose I lose some of them?... Why do they send us off at night? Because of the aircraft, I suppose. Twenty-six. The oldest, Vera—is fourteen, the youngest, Vasya—eight. They are all lined up. By her side is Vasya.

"Where is Vasya? He hasn't written once for four months? It was no use expecting anything now. Where would he write to? Natasha has gone, too... I must not think—everybody has his sorrows..."

Day dawned. The train had stopped at a railway junction. Nina Georgiyevna went out—to have a smoke. She saw scores of trains. Flat

cars loaded with machines; even machines were refugees. . . . In box cars were families, kettles, diapers—from Kursk, from Orel, from Kalinin. . . . They had been travelling for two weeks. . . . An enormous hive had been disturbed—cities, factories, schools were on the move, who knows where to. Here there were peasants' clothes chests, pictures, cattle, archives, strange complicated instruments. They were loaded under a hail of bombs and shells. . . . And the snow kept falling. . . . Nina Georgiyevna was frightened: great as her confidence was, something within her shuddered. An engine driver called to her:

"Have you any cigarettes, comrade?"

He inhaled greedily.

"That's better, I haven't slept for sixty hours—look at the length of this train. . . ."

His eyes were inflamed from weariness, but they were calm. "Elderly, about my age. . . ." And Nina Georgiyevna felt ashamed of her momentary weakness: are we likely to perish when we have people like that?

She soon made friends with the children and knew the story of every one of them. Vasya's father was in the Tanks, his mother worked at the Central Telegraph Office, Oleg's father was an airman, his mother a medical orderly. Vasya related: "Papa said: 'I'll iron them out' and Mama said: 'I don't understand.' . . ." And Varya said: "Papa is at the war and doesn't write any letters." . . . Nina Georgiyevna hastened to reply: "He'll write soon. Hasn't time for that now." . . .

At one station they arrived at, the officials, without making enquiries, wanted to unhitch the car.

"We must put on cars carrying valuables," they said.

Nina Georgiyevna got excited and shouted:

"There are children here! Don't you know that this is our gold reserve?"

Then she herself thought it was funny: "I've become an orator! . . . But isn't it true? We cleared forests, laid roads and built cities. But we did not have a 'gold rush.' We had a different kind of rush—a human rush. . . . When these grow up they will build. And not only factories. . . . Of course, we must have houses, shoes and machines. But that is not enough, a human being wants things to wonder at, music, happiness. Who can create these? Only human beings. I will not live to see it, that's clear, we'll have to build, repair. But these, perhaps, will see it. . . ."

She felt sad because Seryozha was not with her, nobody with whom to talk about the main thing. The children were asleep. The sound of even breathing filled the dark suburban train car. Nina Georgiyevna took a candle stump and a notebook from her knapsack and began to write. She told Sergei about her last days in Moscow, about her sudden departure, she wrote that she was uneasy, that nothing was known about Vasya. She had received a postcard from Valva, she had fixed herself up all right—had a warm room. . . . Then Nina Georgiyevna gave herself

up to her thoughts: "Seryozhenka, I often think of death now, don't worry, I am well, but people have always thought about it, have tried to solve the riddle, science—by combating disease, a gift of so many more years of life, the Christians—with the illusion of the personal resurrection of the dead, a beautiful legend, but how much childish ignorance there is in it—to be resurrected for eternity with the memory of fifty years of life, the pantheists were willing to dissolve in anonymous chaos. I look at the children, and it seems to me that immortality does really exist—in men and women, whether in your own children or those of others makes no difference, it exists in the continuation of thought, of feelings, in their development, their elevation." . . .

The children continued to breathe evenly, and evenly the wheels of the car knocked. Suddenly Nina Georgiyevna crumpled the sheets she had written on. She blew out the candle; she tried to doze off, but sleep would not come; then she opened her eyes and staring at the turbid darkness of the window she waited patiently for the late dawn.

* 13 *

For three months Sergei lived in a fever of anxiety: he did not know whether he would be sent to the front or not. He yearned to go there with all the impatient ardour of his nature. Nina Georgiyevna would say: "You don't hear what I am saying. . . . You are like a sleep-walker. . . ." When Valya went away he did not say a kind word to her. In the train she wept all night: he doesn't love me, I know he doesn't love me. . . . And he, on coming to himself, thought reproachfully: how is it I did not say good-bye to Valya? Nowadays one says "au revoir," "to meet again"—but one does not believe that we shall meet again. . . .

At last he received an appointment. The sapper battalion was being formed in a small town on the Volga. It seemed as though the rumble of the distant thunder had not yet reached this place. People sold honey, apples and cream, and chatted peacefully. This tranquility served to increase Sergei's anxiety. After training exercises he felt so restless that he could neither read, nor talk with his comrades. Usually cheerful and sociable, he drew into himself. The communiqués became more and more alarming. A breakthrough towards Moscow. . . . Germans in Odessa. . . . In Kharkov. . . . In the Donbas. . . . In the Crimea. . . . Sergei glared at the map as if expecting from it an answer—what has happened? . . .

One day a comrade said:

"What strength! . . . Say, you were in France, how was it there?"

Sergei answered:

"I don't know, I left before the war."

Then he reproached himself : how fainthearted I am ! . . . If only they send us off to the front soon ! It's far worse when you are looking on . . .

He was lucky: he had to change at Moscow and was able to see the city. Sleet was falling, it was a grey, misty day. Stern were the footsteps of the military patrols, and stern were the faces of the girls in padded coats. The streets were intersected with barricades, trestle and girder tank barriers. Sergei strode along and smiled to himself vaguely: they'll never take Moscow!

On the Red Square he saw Stalin. He wore an army greatcoat and peaked cap, although it was cold . . . He was calm, and calmly he said: "Germany is bound to collapse." . . .

Sergei remembered how he had been torn by anxiety and he felt ashamed. France? . . . Yes, everybody had fled there—from the President of the Republic to the commanders, simply fell to pieces. But Stalin is at his post. And we held a parade, as we had done every year. Is this not the best answer? True, they have lots of tanks. But men can blow up tanks, and make tanks. And we have the men.

Dozens of times he related at the front: "Yes, yes, he stood on the platform. Every word expressed confidence. Moscow is in the thick of it, cannonades, bombing. The mere fact that Stalin is there is enough. They will never take Moscow, never! . . ."

At first he had often thought: "Why am I not in the tanks, or in the artillery, like Vasya? Even the infantry would be better . . . To read how others go under fire, ram the enemy, and yet trail in the rear oneself, putting up bridges, laying mines . . ." It was not ambition that was prompting him—but romanticism, it is not surprising that Nina Georgiyevna confided the secrets of her heart to him.

And now he is at the front. Before him lies a map: a far larger scale map than the one he had looked at a month ago, it shows neither the Crimea nor Leningrad, the principal city is Naro-Fominsk, every hummock is marked, and every hummock is now more important to him than all the communiqués. Only once did Sergei think to himself as he gazed at the map: why, devil take it, these are the suburbs of Moscow, bungaloes, look where they've got to! . . . But at once this thought was swept away by another: an ideal line of defence . . . There is a certain cure for a great grief: the details of life, painstaking labour, daily, hourly exertion. Sergei was aware that in his work the main thing was—patience; in a moment of candour he said to his commissar. Zonin: "We are ants, real ants. Others fly, ride, but we creep. And we have our twigs and ant hills . . . Useful for war, but unsuitable for the theatre—nobody will write plays about it. And what about you and me? Lousy, but say what you like, very interesting." . . . He cheered up, and in his spare time had long talks with his comrades; he began to resemble the former Sergei; only his eyes changed—they became

sterner, calmer; he noticed this himself, when he shaved—funny, how he had aged! . . .

His letters to Valya were full of tenderness, but she remembered the coldness of their parting and it seemed to her: something's lacking in these letters—ardour, perhaps passion.

To Sergei the war seemed a matter of stern, hard work. There was a lot of snow and it was difficult to march, often they marched across bare snow fields. The cold increased; everybody was glad of this—what must the Germans be feeling! But it was no pleasure to spend the night in the forest; the cold seemed to penetrate to the heart, it made you gasp. The sheepskin coats hardened and seemed like armour. Words coming from the mouth were transformed into heavy vapour, and this vapour reluctantly, slowly, rose to the low sky that resembled a layer of old cotton wool. They crawled over the snow, blundered into snowdrifts. The fingers refused to bend. The roadside was littered with the remains of burnt out automobiles and the carcasses of horses. The men proceeded in single file. Over them flew first a "frame,"* then came Junkers, Messers and Fokkes; black patches and small craters were left on the scorched snow—blood quickly congealed. They pushed on slowly, did not sing, talked little. The artillerymen strained themselves to the utmost, like workers on a heavy job. Signalmen put up wires under fire. Girls, hoarse from talking, kept on repeating meaningless words: "Mignonette," "Comet." Sergei stepped into the battalion hospital; the surgeon, all bespattered with blood, shouted: "You can't come in;" he was sawing off legs, ripping stomachs; wounded were brought in, one after another; he had only just extracted a bomb splinter from the groin of a truck driver who had been bringing up canned food. Scouts, compositors from the divisional newspaper, mortarmen, bakers, airmen and nurses were dying. In all this there was tremendous exertion, labour preceded death and followed it—it was even difficult to bury the dead, the frozen ground would not yield.

Sergei worked as he had worked before the war, ardently, not satisfied with the regulation output, always thinking up something, taking notes, drawing sketches. When he mentioned sham structures to Major Fomichenko, the latter brushed the idea aside. Sergei thought to himself: there are Belchevs here too. . . . He would not let the matter rest, he went to see Colonel Glukhov at Divisional Headquarters.

"Major Fomichenko says that they can't spot the enemy's artillery and mortars—the Germans have put up snow walls and have masked their guns very well. I made a suggestion to him, but he does not approve of it. . . . Permit me to report. Five or six sham structures made of snow. We'll put boards up in place of embrasures and pour water over the snow. . . . Our sappers can do this in one night. . . ."

* German scouting plane.—*Tr.*

"And what next?"

"They will betray the positions of their artillery and mortars."

"Why? . . ."

It turned out that the Colonel had not been listening to Sergei. He had to explain his proposal all over again, from the beginning. Now he spoke in a different tone—as if he were at the Academy. The Colonel looked at him in surprise—seems to be an intelligent fellow. . . . He asked Sergei what Institute he had graduated from and where he had worked before the war. On learning that Sergei had been to Paris the Colonel said:

"You will have dinner with me. Yes, yes! . . . Tell me, now, what sort of Babylon have they got there? . . ."

On leaving Sergei asked:

"Do you permit me to proceed, Comrade Colonel?"

"Carry on. But I don't think you will be able to fool them. Every little lieutenant of theirs has studied this art. But you have chosen the proper place. At all events, no harm will come of it. . . ."

For two days the Germans concentrated their fire on the "dummies," as Sergei called them. He beamed: why, even Fomichenko admitted: "Good." . . . Our artillery put four German guns out of action.

One day it was quiet. It was said that the Germans were trying to get round Moscow—were attacking Dmitrov. Sergei played chess with Zonin, he won two games. At night firing was heard.

It all happened suddenly. In the morning the mail arrived. Zonin said with a yawn: "They are showing 'Traviata' in Moscow—at the Affiliate of the Bolshoi." . . . A telephone call came from Divisional Headquarters: "Send two squads—a new C.P." And suddenly communication ceased. The road had been cut by the Germans—they had broken through to the station, had advanced eight kilometres in a day.

"They are coming this way! . . ."

Sergei would not believe it at first, but soon he heard the sound of firing. He amazed Zonin by his coolness—slowly, almost lazily, he said:

"Strictly speaking, the functions of engineering troops are somewhat different. But taking the circumstances into consideration. . . . To put it briefly, we must break through to the cart road."

He unfolded a map.

The battle was short and sharp. About a hundred German tommy gunners had cut off their road. It was impossible to retreat: there were Germans in their rear. Sergei shouted something, he never remembered what it was. They lost sixteen men. Zonin asserted that the Germans had lost still more; but there was no time for counting. They reached the cart road.

Next day Colonel Glukhov congratulated Sergei:

"Good lad, bent your head. You look like a civilian, so to speak, but you act resolutely. . . ."

Sergei answered:

"Comrade Colonel, the Germans got through by the highroad of our neighbour on the left, we did not lay any mines there."

The battle at the cart road had been an accidental affair for him, but why had they not mined the highroad?—that was their real business: after all, they were sappers....

He succeeded in getting a little sleep. Then he wrote to Valya. For a moment a vision flashed through his mind, like snowdust: a line of tommy gunners.... Feet sinking in the snow.... Selcznev shouted: "I am dying."... Perhaps that is why that letter was unlike the others had been, it throbbed with living feeling, recollections of a spring evening, a vague desire for happiness.

On reading that letter Valya whispered: "I'm so happy, so happy," and tears flowed from her eyes: for the first time she felt frightened, terribly frightened—suppose he is killed?...

Sergei went up to the men. One of them, in a merry mood, was singing:

*Whirling and twirling is Hans in the snow,
His face is all livid, his spirits are low....*

Sergei laughed: "How do you know it's Hans? Perhaps it is Karl?"

Khomenko ran up:

"It's Fritz, Comrade Captain, it can't be otherwise than Fritz. The newspapers print it that way...."

"All right, let it be Fritz. ... The main thing is—his spirits are low."

Sergei no longer heard the words, but the tune sounded mournful, as if a merry-go-round was whirling and dim lights were flickering behind the curtain of rain.... Where had that been? In Paris, with Mado. What a long life lay behind, vows, mistakes, love, mist! Whirling and twirling.... Sergei felt sad for no reason; he was glad when Zonin called to him:

"Let's get to work."

* 14 *

Sergei was now never out of Mado's mind. Here everything merged; recollections of brief feminine happiness, her first love, and thoughts that were new to her. Sergei had expanded, had become life; it seemed to her that everybody was speaking about him. And he remained near and dear to her, she kissed him under these plane trees....

Now Germans were sitting on that bench. One of them had a nice face, smiled.... It would be better if they scowled, threatened!

Mado recalled that dark stormy night when Louis hurried to the sailing boat. He had realized at once.... Perhaps his feet had been planted more firmly on the ground. How did I live? Playing with words.

the lights of a merry-go-round. But the merry-go-round had stopped turning long ago. . . . Even Sergei I sensed rather than understood. I loved him, that is true. . . . Everybody is saying "it's amazing how those Russians are holding out." The Germans write that they did not expect it. . . . I know why. . . . Sergei could crack jokes, smile, dream, but suddenly. . . . Professor Dumas said that they are made of iron, that's not true, but they can be like iron.

Mado eagerly listened to every rumour. Events in the East were agitating everybody. At first Lancier was glad: "The Germans will climb down a bit now, Russia is too big a mouthful, they may easily choke." But no sooner did the Germans report that they had captured Smolensk than Lancier yelled: "I told you they would settle with the Russians even quicker than they settled with us! They are in Smolensk!" (He did not know where Smolensk was, but he remembered that name from his school days.) "Tomorrow, I suppose, Moscow will burn. . . ." Berty was restrained, he emphasized the difficulties of the campaign, the absence of roads, the bravery of the "Reds": "The Germans will cope with them, of course, but not soon." . . . Professor Dumas listened to the London broadcast three times a day; he met Mado with the news: "The Germans are sustaining incredible casualties! . . . I have jotted down somewhere how many divisions they have lost, but I don't remember where. The German radio stations jam the ether, but still you can make out what's being said. The Russians throw themselves under tanks and blow them up, it's incredible! . . ." Marie said: "My master has cheered up immensely, he took a drink yesterday, clinked with me, clinked with the bottle and said—they are killing them off like partridges. . . ."

Mado no longer avoided people; she often visited Dumas, Morillot and Léontine; nearly every day she went to see Sembat. She always found him in front of his easel, swearing—had light, fed up with the Germans, no tobacco. . . . Recently, Mado had found him in an unusually cheerful mood.

"I don't read their newspapers. I haven't got a radio set. Perhaps you think I am cut off from everything? I have my own sources of information. . . . I went into the café on the corner yesterday. Germans were sitting at the tables. . . . I stood at the bar and looked at them—well fed, I thought to myself. One of them ordered cognac, emptied the glass at one gulp and then began to cry—literally, tears dripped from his eyes: 'They're sending me to Russia to be slaughtered.' . . . You understand, Mado, what it means when a boar like that is reduced to tears, don't you? Only the Russians are capable of doing that. A pity Nivelles was not there. Last spring he said to me: 'Strong personalities, Siegfrieds.' . . . But his Siegfried was bawling like a calf. . . ."

From a tin box he took a few stumps he had saved, rolled a cigarette and lit up.

"I often think of your Russian friend now, Mado. . . ."

But almost as soon as he had said that he checked himself—that was tactless, I think. . . . But Mado smiled:

"I think of him too. . . ."

Sometimes she asked herself how it was going with Sergei. After all, it is a frightful war. . . . And at once she would answer: He's alive, of course, he's alive, I feel it! Why, he cannot be killed. . . .

She continued to live in the house of the man she hated. Some people jeered: "She's clinging to the money." . . . Lancier comforted himself with the thought: "Tiffs always happen, Mado—is proud, if she has not left Berty it shows that she worships him." . . . This was in the summer when Mado had just come to her senses. She did not want to think about her life, which resembled a ruin, a half-wrecked house. If, at times, she asked herself what she ought to do now, it was not about changing her residence that she was thinking, not about changing the integument of existence; she wanted to hurl herself upon the first German she met, or go to the Gestapo and say: "You can torture me, I shall not betray anybody—I don't know anything, I have no connections with anybody. . . ." She realized that this was childish, she wandered through the streets dreaming—suddenly I shall meet Josette. . . . It seemed to her that to find Josette was a way out, a road to her lost purity, to liberation.

Berty met this woman who had rejected him at dinner every day. He had not been able to cure himself of this feeling, became embarrassed when she looked at him with her wide, indifferent eyes. Only to her did he try to justify himself, said that he expected neither wealth nor honours from the Germans, that he was thinking of something different: of how to mitigate the hardships of the occupation, to save the lives of Frenchmen. She would listen to him in silence; sometimes she would say with the aloofness of a high society lady: "That's very interesting" and retire to her room. But he crumpled his serviette in fury and glared for a long time at her door. He jeered at himself: a husband in the role of a rejected lover, what a farce! Time to put a stop to it! . . .

Dr. Morillot, first looking round to see whether there was anybody in the next room, said to Mado:

"I managed to get Moscow. Do you know what they said? 'Contempt for death.' I am an old cynic, but even I was amazed. . . ."

Mado looked through the window; the street, polished by the rain and sun, the reddish leaves of the autumn plane trees. She saw something different: snow, blood. Those—were the friends of Sergei, his people. . . . How simple and yet how difficult to grasp! If she will be very brave, a real heroine, perhaps she will not fear death. But contempt? . . . No, she would never be capable of that! . . .

Six months had passed since the day when, lifeless, indifferent to everything, she had yielded to Berty; but she was now unrecognizable. She was no longer the Mado who had plucked the petals from the daisies

in Sembat's studio and had stood, doomed, on the platform of the Gare du Nord. Sternness appeared in her bright, slightly perplexed eyes. Now she felt responsible not only for sentiments but for—action. If, nevertheless, she remained in Berty's house, suffered envious or censorious glances ("she's the wife of that man who"), the person to blame for that was Dr. Morillot, or to be more exact the tall dark man with the Provençal accent who was called Robert. Mado knew that he was not Robert, and she now knew something else—not only across the sea where Louis was, but here, right beside her, in the narrow, winding streets of Paris, people were fighting, falling, dying.

Robert was saved by a fortunate accident. Madame Dubois, the mistress of the greengrocery shop, picked up a wounded man, and instead of reporting the matter to the police she called Dr. Morillot, who was treating her for rheumatism. Morillot did not believe that the Germans could be driven out, he thought that the struggle was senseless. He believed in nothing, in general; in his very childhood, with his first book, with his first kiss, he became possessed with disbelief, in the same way as people can be possessed with belief. He nurtured this disbelief in himself, he lived for it. When he was called to the wounded man he at once understood what the matter was. He knew that you could not joke with the Gestapo, that they could seize both Madame Dubois and himself. But after all, he was not a skunk! A man may have no respect for principles, but if he has no self-respect, life is not worth living.

An idea flashed through Morillot's mind—to hide the wounded man in Mado's house. That would be a perfectly safe place—the Germans thought the world of Berty. And Mado had said on many occasions: "I want to do something."...

Mado did not ask Robert about the circumstances under which he had been wounded. She understood—no questions must be asked. She learned the science of secrecy easily. Robert lay in a small room at the back of Mado's bedroom. Only the old parlourmaid knew about it. Berty never looked into that room. In the evening they talked, recalled peacetime, rambles, books, cities. Mado learned that Robert was a student of natural history and was keenly interested in botany. This amused her: looking at Robert's very broad, rough hands, she, for some reason, pictured him plucking a dandelion.

He showed her a small photograph. A girl in a sport costume standing on a rock; it was difficult to discern the face, Mado thought she was good-looking....

"What's her name?"

"Lucie."

"Is she far away?"

"You must not ask that."

Mado felt envious: Lucie was with them. She was young, but she was trusted....

"What were you fond of before the war, Mado?"

"Painting, I think. . . ."

She told him about Sembat, about the hills near Gelinotte. She said nothing about Sergei—that was too intimate, and besides, there is no need for him to know. . . .

"I married foolishly, I am ashamed to confess it, but at twenty-five I behaved like a little girl. He followed me wherever I went, he is an awful man."

"A businessman."

"Yes, but mad. . . . A good thing it's all over now."

Robert recovered. Dr. Morillot, who visited him often (Mado was the ostensible patient), said: "You can resume your game. Only try to play better—there aren't many women like Madame Dubois." . . .

This was their last evening: they sat in the tiny room, on Robert's bed. The door leading into Mado's room was ajar and the light fell on Robert.

"How's it going in the East, have you heard?"

"Better, I think," answered Mado. "They say they have been checked near Moscow."

"They won't take Moscow," said Robert. He frowned and repeated: "They won't take it, not under any circumstances! . . ."

Mado felt that he was saying this to himself.

"Do you believe in the Russians, Robert?"

He smiled.

"What can I believe in if not in them? I am a Communist, I didn't tell you that before. . . . The Russians are now fighting for us too. We want to help them, but how many are there of us? . . . A handful. But the others. . . . I'm not talking about Vichy. . . . The honest ones. . . . They listen to the London broadcasts, whisper anecdotes into each other's ear, and want the Germans to be beaten, of course, they do. . . . And they are waiting. But the Russians must be having a hard time. I was at the front in nineteen forty. . . . For some reason I am constantly seeing a vision of—snow and fire. I can't picture it, I've never seen Russia. . . . When I escaped and walked, or rather, crawled away. . . . Before Madame Dubois saw me. . . . I was lying flat, I suppose I was in a fever, it seemed to me that I was lying near Moscow. . . ."

"They say 'contempt for death.' I want to understand that, but I cannot. . . ."

He got up and shut the door leading to Mado's room. He did not speak at once, but when he did, his voice was muffled, and he paused every now and again.

"Lucie was arrested on the ninth of October. The last time I saw her was in July. I was in the other zone then. Near Perpignan. . . . She had the job of getting three comrades across. We spent the evening, the night and half the next day together. She left at three forty—the Germans had

only just attacked Russia, we talked about that for a long time, and we said that now we need not be afraid. . . . Late in the evening we bathed, she had a striped bathing suit. She teased me, went in first, splashed water into my face. . . . Next morning she took a long time to dress, she said: 'I must look smart, according to my papers I am an actress.' . . . She had a German permit for Nantes. She asked me whether a light lipstick suited her and I answered—very, I wanted to kiss her, but the train was leaving at three forty. . . . She sent a letter from prison. I know that they tortured her but she did not say anything. . . . She wrote me four lines: 'I love you as I did then, kiss you as I did then, alive, warm and yours. So I will remain. Good-bye, Yves!'"

He stopped speaking. It was dark in the room, they did not see each other. Tomorrow he was going to Nantes, or Dijon. Then will come night, railway sleepers, patrols. Then they will catch him. They tear the fingernails out. . . . And there will be nobody to write to, nobody to say good-bye to. "So I will remain"—with that he must die. . . .

Mado silently left the room; tears choked her, but she could not weep.

Next morning she said farewell to Robert, tightly grasped his huge hand with both her own:

"If you ever need anything, Robert. . . . Not only you personally. . . . Do you understand? . . . I am terribly afraid of torture, but I promise you, I shall say nothing! . . ."

* 15 *

Lancier impatiently waited for Dr. Morillot's arrival—his liver "was giving him hell;" actually, he wanted to talk about world events. Morillot was—a living newspaper, and the only one, you couldn't call those sheets newspapers. They only gave the German version. . . . And to listen to London was a strain on the nerves, the Germans jammed everything, and besides, somebody might report it. . . . Just before Morillot's arrival Lancier had read in the *Paris Soir* a report from the Eastern Front and had become dispirited.

"You see, doctor, I was right—they say they can see Moscow. . . ."

"They have splendid binoculars. But what is there to be glad about?"

Lancier felt offended.

"I am not glad, it's simply that I foresaw this. Do you think it's a fable?"

"I think there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip. And besides, the Germans themselves report heavy fighting."

"That's to our advantage, you know, cher ami. In the end, the Russians will be defeated, the English understand this too. I got London yesterday, they talk as they do at funerals. . . . But the Germans will

leave their teeth and claws there. The Marshal is devilishly cunning. You will see, they will put up a monument to him next to Clemenceau's. . . . Laval is different, he is a rascal, he wants the French to die for Hitler. Happily, we, above all, love logic, and the Siberian frost tempts very few. . . . But I tell you candidly—those whippersnappers who shoot Germans are no better. We must wait. Like the Marshal. . . . The Germans are shooting hostages, that's disgusting. But who gave them the excuse? The Communists. Let the Russians kill the Germans, we have nothing to do with it."

Morillot laughed, a loud, unpleasant laugh; Lancier wiped his face with his handkerchief—it seemed to him as though the doctor had bespattered it with saliva.

"If I were the Lord God, I would make you the Emperor of non-belligerent Monaco, or President of neutral Andorra. By the way, how's your liver? Show me your tongue. . . . Dear, dear! I told you—not a drop of spirits! In the summer I will pack you off to your Marshal—Vichy will be the saving of you."

"It is not a matter of a glass of cognac. I am having lots of trouble. They have again dug up Léo's partnership in Roche aîné. I have explained to them ten, twenty times, that Alpert went long ago, but they are applying the order of the twenty-seventh of September last year—joint-stock companies with even one Jew. But I have a document that proves that Roche aîné is an Aryan firm."

Dr. Morillot was in a spiteful mood, instead of comforting Lancier, he roared with laughter again:

"I'd advise you, Maurice, to go straight to Stülpnagel and demonstrate to him that you are really an Aryan."

"I don't know what you are laughing about. I am suffering, like all Frenchmen."

"Only recently you tried to prove to me that you were happy like all Frenchmen."

Lancier lost his temper and shouted in a shrill voice:

"I am living with my people! Like the Marshal. . . . I have not become a German, or a Scotchman, or a Tatar. I have preserved my spiritual independence. I think what I like, say what I like. . . ."

"Not so loud, cher ami, I beg of you—not so loud! They talk loudly only in the Gestapo. They even shout there. . . . Not a drop of spirits! Diet, exercise, quiet. As for your 'spiritual independence,' save it, it may yet come in useful. . . ."

When Morillot went away Lancier sat and pondered. "I think I got a little heated. . . . Morillot is an old jester, fond of a joke. But I am afraid they want to lay their hands on Roche aîné. It was silly to have connected the reputation of an old French firm with the name of Alpert. But who would have thought it? . . . Léo is a good engineer and a nice fellow. But it has turned out awful. . . ."

Lancier decided to take a stroll—exercise, as Morillot had said. It was a foggy November day, the air was impregnated with the smell of the sea, and of burning: the trees unexpectedly stretched sharp prickly hands through the white curtain. The dreary month, thought Lancier; this calmed him at once. Life is proceeding in its regular way. The seasons follow each other. Look, the children are going home from school, they don't care about Hitler, or Moscow, or Roche aîné, they are full of fun and frolic. I used to play pranks like that at one time. . . . Mado is happy. Perhaps, in a year or two, I shall have a grandson. In the spring these trees will be clothed in green. Only Marceline will not return. Poor Marceline, she died at the most awful time. It then looked as if everything was collapsing. . . . But Paris is reviving: exhibitions, first nights, new books. Of course, it is unpleasant to collide with Germans everywhere, but Germans are better than bombs. . . . I can picture the inferno Moscow is now! I wonder what has become of Monsieur Vlahov, whether he is alive. A fanatic, that's true, but a very refined gentleman, and loves art. . . . It's horrible that people should fight when one can read poetry, talk with one's friends, grow roses!

By the evening Lancier had completely recovered his composure, he no longer thought about the fighting near Moscow, or about the menace that hovered over Roche aîné. . . . He perused a cookery book and dreamed: when it again becomes possible to get everything you want I will prepare an international peace dinner: Russian borshch, caviar—we'll commence with the bravest, then sauerkraut and sausage—in honour of the Führer, then English roast beef, a Lyons poularde with truffles, Sicilian ice cream. This will be the apotheosis of the culinary art. By that time everybody will have managed to quarrel a dozen times and in the end make peace. Dumas doesn't want to meet Nivelles, I will seat them together. Lejean will be released. Perhaps even the Russian will come, if he is not killed. . . . With these pleasant thoughts he fell asleep.

The serious talk about Roche aîné took place next day. On entering the large bleak office Lancier shuddered—in the most conspicuous place, at a writing desk, sat Gaston Roy. Lancier knew that he was playing an important role, but he had not expected to meet him under such circumstances. Roy greeted him politely and then addressed the others (one, judging by his accent, was a German):

"We shall be interested to hear what Monsieur Lancier has to say."

Lancier took some papers from his brief case; suppressing his agitation, he began to relate the history of Roche aîné. He quoted all the figures, information about the shareholders and related what financial difficulties the firm had encountered. His voice trembled when he explained:

"My father-in-law was a turner, he came to Paris from Charlesville and founded the factory. He was a born genius. And my

father-in-law's father had worked as a blacksmith for Marshal MacMahon. . . ."

"Very interesting," said Roy.

The man with the German accent seconded him:

"Extremely interesting. Like a novel by Zola, isn't it? . . ."

Lancier wiped his perspiring brow, returned the papers to his brief case and was about to get up, but Roy detained him:

"I have one question to ask. . . . If Monsieur Lancier asserts that Alpert played no role whatever in Roche aîné, how does he explain the preference that was given to Soviet orders to the detriment of others, Electra, for example? I remember meeting a Bolshevik representative in Monsieur Lancier's house. . . . One of two things—either these were the machinations of the Jew Alpert, or Monsieur Lancier had close relations with the 'Reds.' I would like to hear your explanation. . . ."

Lancier was thrown into confusion. Everybody did business with the Russians at that time, even the Germans. . . . Where's the logic of it? That Roy is determined to ruin me! . . .

"Why are you silent, Monsieur Lancier?"

"I, really, I don't know. . . . I must collect my thoughts. . . ."

All the others left the office. Only Roy and Lancier remained. It was a long room—a heavy writing desk with ink wells, blotting pads, ash trays. Then there was a table covered with a green cloth, for meetings. On the wall—portraits—Hitler, Marshal Pétain and some old man in eyeglasses, might be a scientist, or an industrialist. Lancier sat at some distance from Roy. Roy perused some papers. He looks much younger, thought Lancier, it's not surprising—it is his time now. For some reason he recollected: the seasons, in the spring the trees will be clothed in green. . . . In the Argentine it is summer now. . . . That Roy was lucky. But what does he want of me? . . . As if only Vlahov had visited Corbeille. . . . I also invited Roy—for a cup of coffee. . . .

At last Roy tore himself away from the papers.

"We do not intend to remove you, but we must establish control. . . . If you want to collaborate earnestly, not only formally, we shall find common ground."

"I don't understand."

"You must not get excited. No doubt you have high blood pressure. Do you remember the row you kicked up in that restaurant? 'Germans! . . . Germans! . . .' It is dangerous at your age. . . ."

Lancier fumed. Well, let them rob! But who gave him the right to mock?

"I will not permit anybody to talk to me in that way! I am not a politician, everybody knows that. I am a plain Frenchman. Like the Marshal. . . ."

Roy stepped up to Lancier and, smiling, said:

"Tell me now, where is your son?"

Lancier got up and staggered out of the room. He saw neither the passers-by nor the houses—only the fog—over the city, over the sea, over the world.

* 16 *

Two hens wandered dejectedly round the small garden. A young woman came out of the house carrying a bowl: the hens livened up. A woman neighbour enquired over the fence:

"How is Monsieur Chevalier?"

"A little better, thank you. I think the cupping helped him. . . . Still, he cannot get up yet. I have decided to call the doctor."

"Only don't call a young one, the young ones are—charlatans."

Chevalier was sitting at a tiny receiving set taking notes: "The fascists are exerting all efforts to break through to Moscow, but our forces are holding the enemy up at all points. The enemy must be checked and annihilated at the approaches to the capital of our Socialist Motherland." . . .

"Margot, this is for Michaud. And take Fourier's letter. They can print them at the same time. . . ."

Fourier was a jolly fellow, used to tell comic stories about Marseilles and carve Bonnet's face and long nose out of a potato. . . . They had been in prison together—under Daladier. . . . Fourier had related his impressions of Moscow, he had been there with a delegation in nineteen thirty-six: "You can't imagine what kind of people they are, fighting all the time—against enemies, against routine, against drought, against snow blockages. . . ." It is true the Russians were inwardly prepared, not like us. . . . Fourier had often talked about his wife, had shown him a photograph of his little daughter. . . .

"Where's Fourier's letter, Margot? Will they be able to read it? . . . Jacques copied it. . . ."

"My dear, my love,

"In an hour's time they are going to shoot us. I want to say that I was happy with you as ever a man can be happy. We will meet death like men. When Lolo grows up, tell her everything. You must live. The Red Army will be victorious, that is as certain as that I will die in an hour's time. France will be free! Good-bye. Néné!"

He knew those lines by heart by now, but still, he was agitated as he paced the room.

"Do you want anything else? I am going."

He mechanically bolted the door. How strangely we are living! I have lived in this cottage with Margot for a week—and I don't even know her real name, don't know who she is. All I know is that her

father was killed. . . . And she has no suspicion who I am. But we have learned to know each other as if we had lived together for a year. Strange. . . .

There was a knock at the door—two hurried ones and a soft one after a pause. An elderly man carrying a small bag entered.

"You are as punctual as a German, Jacques."

"Your neighbour is far too curious. She asked me: 'Are you the doctor?' A good thing Margot warned me. I will take the radio set—it will be my case of instruments, a doctor is supposed to have one—to measure blood pressure. But these lodgings are no longer safe. Has Carrier prepared those papers for you?"

"And what papers! A sanitary inspector, plus a testimonial signed by Bert, plus a German permit to the southern zone with a photograph. Do you remember what they fabricated a month ago? Even a baby could see it was a forgery. They've learned how to do it now. How's it with Pepe?"

"All's well. Do you need anybody?"

"No, I don't. But find somebody in Margot's place for communication. She is hiding the fact that she is sick, she has frightful attacks, she cannot walk so much."

"Do you think that affair with Bert will come off?"

"I hope so. What about your group? And Pepe?"

"I want to ask you what you think is the most important."

"An officer. Best of all a Gestapo man."

"Why waste people on that? There will only be one scoundrel less. . . ."

"It is of enormous importance. When Frédo laid that one out at the Barbès Metro station, it set the whole of Paris talking. In Nantes our people at once retaliated to the shooting of hostages—and Lieutenant-Colonel Gotz is not one of the small fry. . . . Don't think I am chasing after the romantic, but at present a gesture is necessary. They are dinning it into everybody's ears that they have smashed the Russians. I know the Russians will retaliate, but the people don't know anything. Everybody is depressed. They want to create a semblance of calm, read the newspapers: 'Life is running into its regular groove. . . . Prewar atmosphere. . . .' We need something sensational, something everybody can see. Do you understand?"

"I do. Anna can be brought in. . . ."

"Only for the preparations, but she must take no risks—we shall still need her. . . ."

There was a knock at the door. The host hurriedly lay down and covered himself with a blanket. The doctor opened the door. It was that same curious neighbour.

"I hope I haven't disturbed you? . . . The doctor has such a nice face, it inspires you with confidence at once. I had a young doctor treat

me once, he was a real charlatan. . . . How have you found Monsieur Chevalier? I, of course, know nothing about medicine, but Siam ointment helped my late husband, cured him completely. . . .”

They got rid of her with difficulty.

“Luc, you must go at once. I will go first and detain that woman. . . . Yes, yes, I will examine her, sound her lungs, on my word of honour! Let me know tomorrow, won’t you? Communication through Margot?”

“No, through Pauline. Au revoir, Jacques. Don’t torture the neighbour. . . .”

Luc looked round the room. A portrait of an old woman in a kerchief, a broken clock, some scraps of sausage, medicine bottles and a detective story on the table. . . . Thus ends the life of the gold-braid maker Chevalier and of his young wife. In a few minutes’ time—he will take a step forward in his career. I think I remember everything. . . . Sanitary inspector Auguste Dreux, born on the fifth of February, eighteen hundred and ninety-eight in Morteau, Department of the Doubs, father’s name Henri-Jacques, father dead, mother named Amélie, resides in Besançon. I am a widower, was married to Simon, née Rousset, have a daughter Yvonne, eleven years of age, lives with her grandmother. How many more times will I have to change my name, profession, parents, wives, children. He proudly stroked his full moustaches, real moustaches—“pepper and salt”—he had managed to grow them; it was the moustaches that made him unrecognizable. Even his comrades who had known him before the war were deceived, to them he is the unknown Luc. Only the waiter at the café was nearly the cause of his undoing; on seeing him in the street he had shouted: “How do you do, Monsieur Lejean! I haven’t seen you for a long time.” . . . Lejean expressed genuine surprise: “You are mistaken—my name is Delambert.” Waiters are a dangerous lot, they have a professional memory. . . .

He walked. It was a long stretch—across the whole city. But there were raids in the Metro every now and again. Of course his papers were A-1, but why tempt fate? . . . He walked slowly, had to stop often. How soft I have become! Scandalous. . . .

Behind the shields, blinds and shutters life proceeded in its customary way. Cafés and restaurants are overcrowded. All are in their places—the maître d’hôtel, the conférenciers, the prostitutes and the police. A German with a girl. Another. . . . He is saying to her in French: “Do you want to go to the movies or to the theatre? . . .” They have learned. And besides, they do not need much—a hundred words. And the French? . . . Well, they are learning to forget words. Evidently man is made that way—if he is driven out of his house, robbed of his clothes and terrified, he will be glad of any corner, of patched trousers, of the semblance of peace. They trade, they dine, they kiss, they yawn. . . . No, we must show that there are real people in France! It is possible to hush up the way the Communists died in Chateaubriant. But when Frédo

fired—that couldn't be hushed up.... I know Pepe. He was not Pepe then.... Such a one will not falter. They can say what they like, but our people have passed the test. Before, people joined the Party, presented recommendations, paid dues. Not so now. Now the test is made in the Gestapo.... And Communists can hold their tongues, that is not a mere phrase....

I will see Josette soon. Incredible!... How long it is that we have not seen each other? She came to visit me in prison in May, after that they took me away. That makes it nineteen months.... Jacques doesn't know who Pauline is, he did not even notice that I was in a hurry....

He had escaped from the concentration camp in September. Forests, decayed leaves. He had heard Germans swearing somewhere near. A good thing there were no dogs.... He was sent to Paris, and at once plunged into the work. Josette was in the other zone; he had heard only recently that she was alive. He had heard about his son—Paul is in Limoges. Roger had said: "He got some boys together, they are operating."... Funny—when they took me, Paul was still a child.... No doubt Josette has aged a great deal....

He had prepared himself for the meeting, but still his heart froze. How tired she is! And quite grey.... A hell of a life!

She looked at him like a child, almost imploringly, afraid to say a word, afraid to move, to tear her eyes away. They stood opposite each other in a strange room filled with motley furniture. Statuettes, vases, silk cushions.... But they did not see anything. Josette's cold hands feebly pressed Lejean's hand.... Then Josette pressed against him and laid her head upon his breast. That is how it was long ago, in the days of bliss.... Josette had then been a wild young thing, passionate and laughter loving.... He only repeated softly: "My poor one, my good one!..."

"Tell me the truth, Henri, you cough, don't you? I have brought you some warm underclothing. And your medicine. I suppose you have not taken it once...."

He smiled—there was a time when they took treatment, went to Brittany, heard Ravel, solved crossword puzzles....

"I never thought we would meet, Josette, did you?"

"Somehow, I believed we would all the time."

"Are you remaining in Paris?"

"Until Thursday. Tomorrow we shall be together all day. But you had better go now. It is safer at Delay's, nothing here has been verified...."

He shook his head vigorously as if in an effort to rouse himself, and suddenly, changing his tone, he said in a businesslike way:

"Have you seen the leaflet about the battle of Moscow? Tomorrow I must do two more—an article from *Pravda* and Fourier's letter."

"I will take them, we will print them there. Oudinot was caught in a trap."

"And Charles?"

"Why, don't you know? He was killed—in Saint-Denis. Pitou managed to get away. Yes, just imagine, Robert has turned up!"

"Who?"

"Robert. You don't know him, he was in Choisy with Bertier. Bertier and Kiki were caught, but Robert got away. I was sure he had been caught too. It's a funny story—Berty's wife sheltered him. You are not up to date on society news, Berty's wife is—Mado, you know, Lancier's daughter. . . . Robert goes into raptures over her, he says that she ought to be given something to do, he has probably fallen in love with her. . . ."

"Mado—Berty's wife? . . ." He laughed. "She has ended badly. . . . But wait. . . . You say she wants to help? . . . That's devilishly important! You must talk to her, Josette. Find out whether she is in earnest."

"Do you trust her, Henri?"

"I don't know. . . . But somehow I think she's decent. Au revoir, Josette, until tomorrow!"

Again he walked down the dark, wet streets. Fog. . . . And behind those blinds—life, other people's, perhaps feigned, but with a lamp, a round table, children. Tomorrow he will see Josette again. They had not even had a good talk. . . . But perhaps he would not see her. . . . Where has she gone? Big raids are taking place now. . . . He smiled—we are playing hide-and-seek with death all the time. Yet it is enough for us to see each other for me to get merry. . . . This is no time for sentiment. . . . If we send Pepe. . . . I am sorry for the young folk, Josette and I have lived our lives. . . . Berty—is a splendid organizer and a demagogue. . . . Why on earth did Mado tie herself up with him? . . . The madcap! But she's honest, one feels that. . . .

He spent the night in a bare room—a folding bed and a dress-maker's dummy—a body without a head, without arms. As he was falling asleep he saw—the dummy move, breathe, beg for mercy. And then there was nothing, except slumber, profound, like a swoon.

* 17 *

When Bill Coster was sent to Russia as a war correspondent he was overjoyed: that's where fame can be won! In France there were too many well-known correspondents. And besides, how long did France last? It is silly, of course, to drag out events, but a war ought not end in a few weeks. Russia, however, is a vast country, and Bill will have time to get newspaper readers accustomed to seeing his signature.

But everything turned out differently. He found himself in Kuibyshev. He must send a thousand words every day. But what can he write about? No sensations, no interviews, no vivid scenes. The editor is surprised, sends telegrams, thinks I am—a coward. Yet I am ready to

go under fire to get copy. But the Russians answer: "Wait." . . . The newspaper correspondents spend their time drinking day and night (the whiskey has run out so they have taken to vodka), play cards and make bets on—when they will have to scoot from here—in the winter or in the spring.

When he was still in New York Bill had said to his editor: "I will describe the death agony of the Reds." One did not have to be a prophet to forecast Russia's defeat. Joe had told Bill about the reverses the Russians had sustained in Finland. And Bill himself had been in France, he knew what the German army was. . . . On arriving in Russia he had said to himself: "Everything will move even quicker than I thought. . . ." He was shown to an old-fashioned room in a hotel; he opened a door, thinking it was the bathroom, and then sneezed long and loud from dust, there was not even a washstand—everybody washed together, somewhere at the end of the corridor. It was impossible to get a telephone call through. Everybody was in a hurry, and everybody was late; he was sent from one person to another. Obviously they could not hold out against the Germans. He liked the Russians—nice fellows, didn't put on airs, had a sense of humour. And besides, the Russians were almost allies. . . . But that didn't make any difference, they would be defeated just the same. Had he not come to describe Russia's death agony. Only a low-grade journalist has no idea beforehand what he is going to write. . . .

Bill Coster had come up in the journalistic world very quickly; only ten years before he had been an unknown reporter in Atlanta, and the news editor had carefully blue-pencilled his burglary or fire reports. He made his name in connection with the failure of the Davis & Co. Bank. He had an uncle who was a Stock Exchange speculator. Bill regarded him as a curmudgeon—he wouldn't give a fellow even a ten dollar bill, but it was this uncle who turned out to be his benefactor: "Write a story about Davis, you can take my word for it—he'll go smash within a month, and America will ring with the scandal." Bill wrote an article entitled "The Twilight of Peter Davis." and as a result he became the staff correspondent of a big New York newspaper. Later, too, he made capital out of other people's misfortunes. His dispatches from Paris headed "The Decline of France" proved a hit. He was won over by another newspaper. He earned good money and bought himself a cottage near New York. Now he was to write about "The Death Agony of the Russians," that would be his triumph.

Of course, he would prefer that the Russians should defeat the Germans. He is an American first, and the Germans are inciting the Japanese, sinking ships, they are lording it everywhere. . . . The Russians are nice people; they have no idea of comfort, are muddle-headed, and have invented an unintelligible social system. But if they like it, it's their business. . . . They are not threatening America as the Germans are doing. What a pity they will be defeated soon.

But all this is politics, and he likes something different, for example, to go to the seaside with his friends, to crack jokes, tell silly stories. Everybody knows that Bill Coster knows how to have a good time. And when you are at work you have to think about getting ahead of the others. That is why he was so bored in Kuibyshev, that is why he is so happy now. He has been extraordinarily lucky: he has received permission to go to the front. Sam must be biting his fingernails with envy. . . .

The aeroplane flew very low; it looked as though any minute it would hit the peasants' huts weighted down with snow. Bill even smiled at the huts. Why was I allowed to go? One can never understand these Russians. I had given up asking, and suddenly came a telephone call: "Pack your things. . . ." Even if they don't show me anything I will get a scoop. I shall be able to write: "I have been at the front near Moscow." Two weeks later I shall be in Teheran. I will write a moving, thrilling story about the—last hours, last minutes. . . .

Bill was at the front three days. He was received by General Shebushev, was invited to dinner.

"Do you think you will hold out much longer?" enquired Bill. "We're not thinking of leaving."

Bill did some quick thinking—this can be described very vividly: tragic situation, the last battles near Moscow, the General—he is probably an ordinary workingman, fine frank face, naive but brave, an American arrives and the General says "I will die as a Russian should die." . . . That will get them. Bill himself was moved by the words he had conjured up, and with unfeigned emotion he said: "General, I want to drink to your health." . . .

The General swore a long time after Bill had left:

"It's hell enough here without the likes of them! . . . Haven't I got enough on my hands! . . . Now I ask you, why did they send a clown like that to me? . . ."

The Adjutant sighed respectfully.

They showed Bill a battery in action, and a dugout where gloomy soldiers were warming themselves: they took him to a hill from which the enemy positions were visible. He saw nothing except snow and fir trees, but he decided—I will write that I saw the Germans when they were preparing to storm Moscow. . . . He received impressions enough; he even went through a heavy bombing; he lay in the snow delighted. The officer who accompanied him grew anxious: what if he were killed? There would be a hell of a row about it! . . . When they got up he asked Bill: "Aren't you frozen? It was unpleasant, wasn't it?" . . . Bill answered: "Oh no! It's extra stuff for copy. A stroke of luck. . . ." Towards the end he was taken to the hospital to see Krylov—somebody had told the officer who accompanied Bill that Krylov was an interesting person and that he spoke a little English. . . .

Bill looked over the ward perfunctorily and for some reason fingered a bedsheet.

"Sackcloth," growled Krylov. "If you intend to send any decent ones, I, personally, will not refuse them."

Bill hastily answered:

"I will certainly write...."

He kept silent, he did not know how to start the conversation—that surgeon embarrassed him for some reason.

"I think the Americans want to help, but it's a matter of time.... A difficult voyage, long distance.... May get here too late...."

"Well, they'll get here in the summer, it's hard, of course, but we can wait...."

"You are very optimistic, it seems. Up to now I have talked only with military men, and they are narrow specialists. Our military men are like that too.... I understand that a general must be confident that his army will be victorious even in defiance of logic, that is his professional duty, just as it is your professional duty to cure the incurable. Near Lille I talked with a French general and he said to me: 'The battle of France is only just beginning.' But next day he surrendered to the Germans. You are a man from a different circle. you don't wear blinkers. So it's your opinion that this is going to last a long time?"

Krylov shrugged his shoulders:

"Now really, I don't know. I was a specialist—nose and throat. But you want something different—a Pythian oracle.... No, speaking seriously, at first I thought it would end quickly, but now I have my doubts.... We must arm ourselves with patience, it may last a year, or two...."

Bill put his notebook aside and looked at Krylov in amazement:

"Do you really think the Russians will continue to resist after they have lost Moscow? Where? On the Volga?..."

Only now did Dmitri Alexeyevich realize what the journalist was driving at; his face flushed, but he retained his self-control.

"I really don't know why you are so nervous. Perhaps you are not accustomed to surroundings like this. How are you standing the cold, all right? Vodka is very good for it, you know. You must not give way to panic; you write for the newspapers, that shows that you are a man of education.... It's no use drawing a comparison with France, they were only playing about there. But here.... Come and have a look!..."

He dragged Bill down the aisle between the cots in which the wounded were lying.

Bill's gaze met eyes dilated with pain, blazing or dim, dark and light, many eyes. He felt ill at ease. And Krylov murmured:

"These did not surrender like that general. There has been some muddle, of course. Look how long the Germans had prepared for this. . . . But it's all right now, we're holding on. But still, I can't understand you, your President has spoken so well, and you are our ally in a way—and suddenly you blurt out stuff like that. A good thing you said it to me. Somebody else might have taken offence. You are ordering the funeral too soon. You don't believe we will smash them, do you?"

They had changed roles: now it was Bill's turn to answer. He did not want to be hypocritical: that surgeon riled him, and yet he liked his bluntness.

"I think that, in the end, they will lose. After all, Russia is only an episode. There have been other episodes—Poland, France. Even assuming the worst—that they occupy England after they have finished with you—there still remains America. They'll not get us down. We shall work ten years, twenty, but in the end we'll defeat them."

He looked round the dimly lit ward; his eyes again encountered the eyes of the wounded; he added softly:

"We shall come to your rescue. . . ."

Pity I can't give him a piece of my mind, thought Krylov. It's an intricate business is diplomacy, I may cause trouble; at least, let them send bedsheets. He proffered his visitor his hand:

"I must go and attend to my patients. I wish you a safe journey home."

But he could not restrain himself:

"As to who will rescue whom, we shall see."

From Teheran Bill sent eleven long dispatches. In one of them he described his meeting with Krylov: "He is a rough gem, a Russian bear who speaks in the language of Shakespeare, a muzhik capable of handling a lancet. Like all Russians, he is, of course, a mystic. He realizes that defeat is inevitable, but he believes in victory. The Russians believe with the ease with which Americans smoke, or drink coffee. While talking to Krylov I learned the secret of the Russians' fanaticism: unspoilt by life, these people calmly meet death. That surgeon and his patients can die easily because they have lived so hard, perhaps it is simply that they have not lived at all. . . ."

After the American left the mail arrived. Krylov received a letter from his wife: "Dear Mitya. Things here are going on as usual. The biggest news is about Natasha, there was no need for you to have been worried about her, she is alive and well and is with me now. From Ryazan she was sent to the front, she says that she wrote to you from there twice, but of course, you did not receive the letters—she had the old field post office number, and her letter to me went astray. She was at the front only three weeks, she was sent to the

rear because she is expecting a baby, she is now in her sixth month. There's no news from Vasya. Nina Georgiyevna writes that she doesn't know anything about him either, I have made enquiries at the People's Commissariat, but I have had no reply. Outwardly, Natasha seems to be bearing it calmly, but I know how the girl is suffering, she felt better when she was out there. She has grown thin, but she is serving in the hospital here and, in general, is keeping up well. I have organized a soldiers' service centre at the railway station and there is plenty of work to do, all at night. We think of you and of Moscow. Keep well, dear!"

Dmitri Alexeyevich read the letter and blew his nose loudly. I'm sorry for Natasha!... I'm sorry for everybody. Who thought this up?... They sit and invent means for curing colds, and after that, if you please—shrapnel shells, explosive shells, a complete assortment... Everybody wants happiness. How glad Natasha was that she was going to Minsk! And why is it necessary to shoot a lump of iron into a man's guts and then extract it?... He blew his nose again and suddenly began furiously to scold himself: what's this slobbering? One would think I was illiterate and didn't know where the fascists come from. We must beat them, not philosophize. It's that American's fault, he upset me. Well, they are not fighting, they are looking on, calculating, that's their business, but he came to visit human beings—he sees the people shedding their blood. But what does he care? All he wants is sensation. "Look at this fountain pen—a new make!"... But what will he write with his fountain pen? Wretched little soul... Time to attend to your patients, Dmitri Alexeyevich, that's what!

* 18 *

They dug in on the edge of a forest. This was the fifth day they had been holding on. But how much had they retreated before that!... Lukutin vaguely recalled the names of the villages, the black smoke hovering over the roads, the twisted rails. They pushed on, but not in the direction they wanted to go, dug in, fired and again retreated. Few were left of those who on that sultry summer day had marched with Lukutin through the side-streets of Zamoskvorechiye. Zharov, Slepnikov, Korovin, Katz. And also Misha. Very few! These have remained near Vyazma, near Gzhatsk.... Then they were withdrawn, assigned to another regiment, the direction changed, and they retreated, retreated again. Klin. Solnechnogorsk. And now they had hooked on tight.

Lukutin pictured to himself what this forest looked like in the summer. Wild strawberries, shade, ferns, girls hallooing. People came here on Sundays. Some Papa in a Tolstoy blouse would lie down, make

himself comfortable and read an old copy of *Vechernaya Moskva*, while Mama would gather mushrooms, and the children would gather hazel nuts. Formerly, Lukutin had disliked crowded places and when he saw suburban woods littered with egg shells and torn newspapers, which seemed to him to be more numerous than leaves and grass, he scowled; but now he recalled such a Sunday as if it were a beautiful fairy tale. Will I never see it again?...

I often came here in nineteen thirty-nine, no, in nineteen thirty-eight. The Snegirevs lived here in the summer. So Moscow is quite near.... The bungaloes commence where the wood ends. It was funny—you walk along, in a garden people are drinking tea, enjoying themselves—life exhibited, like in a shop window.... But how near, it's frightful to think of it! A little further on—there's Khimki, and beyond that Sokol. Formerly it was Petrovsky Park, and it was considered to be outside of the city. Moscow has expanded immensely.

He began to think of Moscow and his own childhood became interwoven with that of Paulenka, unexpectedly he recalled events, faces, words. Concerning such moments people say "a man is reminiscing," but one can reminisce in different ways, just as clouds are different—now feathery, now heavy and dense. Reminiscences may resemble excavations, a book in which there are chapters, pages, footnotes; they may resemble mineral strata, a heap of sand. Lukutin's reminiscences were a tangled skein. They started with the word "Sokol." Then came the names of streets and side-streets. He tried hard to remember what they were formerly called and what they were called now. Glinishchevsky Street—that's Nemirovich-Danchenko Street. What is Myortvy Street called now?... I have forgotten.... Strange names, homely—Sobachya Ploshchadka, Dorogomilovo, Zatsepa....* A good thing we have hooked on! Fedoseyev said: "We will hook on to the ground with our teeth." He was buried near Uvarovo, there's a headstone there with the letter "F." He used to work at the Ball Bearing Plant. That is far from the centre. What tramcar goes there? I don't remember, I don't remember anything.... They are now extending the Metro to the Stalin Plant. Simon Monastery.... They say that Karamzin's Liza drowned herself in the pond there. And Tolstoy's Natasha lived in Vorovsky Street. I think the Writers' Union is there now. That was when I took Paulenka to the Zoo.... She was delighted with the bear cubs, and when she saw the elephant she cried out "Uncle Petya." It's true, Petya has a long nose. He is now in the artillery. The artillerymen are fine lads, how many times have they helped us out! Fearless.... They are banging away splendidly even now, heavier than in the morning. They have traditions.... Funny—how did they fire the King of Cannon?*** Yes, the Kremlin is beauti-

* Dog Street. Darling Street. Hook Street.—Tr.

** The giant cannon in the Kremlin.—Tr.

ful, nothing like it anywhere, it is not Byzantium, not Italy, something different, our own—purity, great clarity. Moscow is old, “not built in a day” as they say. . . . How old is that tree? My father could have told you at once. Must be very old. It grew, froze, shed its leaves, became green again, and now it may perish like a human being—one shell, and it’s done for. All theirs go wide. But look how ours hit, and this is going on all day, they must have received reinforcements. We know nothing here, but I think, they write, that we have hooked on in earnest. Can’t be otherwise—Moscow. They dropped leaflets—they can see Moscow. They can see it through their binoculars, perhaps. . . . Mama had a funny pair of opera glasses—mother-of-pearl, like a seashell. They took me to the ballet once. What was it? *The Sleeping Beauty*? I don’t remember. I couldn’t understand where they dropped to through the trap door; I asked, but Mama felt embarrassed. I was in the preparatory class then, was very proud of my uniform. There was a garden opposite the high school. Eight years of my life is connected with that garden. Nadva looked for a five in the lilac and found a three she said she would be unhappy. I began to tell her that happiness already existed, and suddenly ran away. How old was I then? Fifteen. Or sixteen. And later it was the same—I couldn’t say the most important thing. . . . There, it is getting dark. The days have become short, naturally—December. Before you can look round—it’s dark. So it is with everything—you don’t have time to finish building, to grow fond of a thing, to live to see it. . . . I am the oldest here. Zharov is nineteen. When we were told that we had recaptured Rostov he clapped his hands like a little boy. That’s a big thing—Rostov. They are determined to capture Moscow, look how they are pushing. . . . Awful to think that they are so near! But they won’t capture it, we have hooked on tight everywhere now. Misha said that there was perfect order in Moscow, not even a trace of panic. I’d love to have a peep at it, if only with one eye! Moscow must be different now. . . . Yesterday Misha talked to a prisoner. The German asked where Stalin is. Misha answered—at his C.P. in Moscow. He didn’t believe it. . . . They’ve grown so stupid, it’s difficult to imagine—Goethe, Fichte, Hegel, it doesn’t fit in, somehow. If Richter had had more sense he would have talked to me differently. Perhaps he is somewhere around here, trying to take Moscow. Why not? That’s the one I’d like to do in! . . . Six months ago I didn’t think I’d want to kill, it was unintelligible to me. Perhaps I have become brutalized? No, even my father would have taken up a gun. I don’t think Tolstoy would have been able to keep out of it. But they are not only stupid, they are cruel, they kill children. A good thing Paulenka is far away. . . . If I am killed she will forget her father—she is so small. And Katya won’t tell her. I know that. Aha! They’ve got the range now. . . . Devil take it, what an inferno it is

here! I wonder whether anybody will describe this later on? But it's not a matter of description.... How is Paulenka out there? Katya has not even written whether they have a warm room or not.... After all, I have known happiness, it's not true that it flashes past, and is gone. The mere fact that I have Paulenka is a great happiness. I had my work. On paper it was only blueprints, figures, but every building thrilled me. Sorry I was unable to build something in Moscow. I never asked myself whether I loved Moscow, I used to say—Leningrad is more beautiful, only now do I feel how much I love every street, every house. And houses—are people....

When night came the forest seemed to be filled with large numbers of men. They crowded round Lukutin, some came up close, talked, others walked past like passers-by, or suddenly lined up, formed ranks for incomprehensible marches. Here there were school chums, and Sergei, and employees from the People's Commissariat, builders and old botanists—father's friends, and Nadya with a sprig of lilac, and workmen. For some reason they were marching amidst the first snowfall past the Alexandrovsky Park, carrying a red coffin. "A v-ic-t-im you f-e-ll...." Lukutin remembered—that was after the October Revolution.... To the flashing eyes were added sounds, they drowned everything. Why are they singing so loudly? He understood: it was inside him. And the people were inside him, nobody could take them away, Nadya says she will be happy, Paulenka is playing hoops.... Where is that? Why, of course, how is it that he didn't recognize it—the Park of Culture, on the right there's a kiosk.... Sergei is right, his project is an interesting one.... And Moscow is no longer beyond the highroad, it is not near, and it is not far, it is within him.

Before the Germans launched their attack at dawn there was a short moment of silence, and after the thunder of the night, that silence seemed exceptionally sweet. Lukutin smiled. The forest was not what it had been yesterday—it was shattered, mutilated. One could not believe that there were living people here....

The Germans did not expect to meet with further resistance and dashed across the bare, snow-covered fields. Then the machine guns rattled. Misha yelled: "Bring 'em up!..." Beads of perspiration broke out on Lukutin's face; the cold was fierce, and everything was covered with hoarfrost—eyelashes, and the hair over the temples.

The attack was checked right here in the forest. There was no respite: a counter-attack was launched by a fresh regiment—it had been brought up only the day before. This explains the drumming I heard last night, thought Lukutin. He wanted to shout this to Misha, but before he could do so—he fell face forward in the snow.

When the medical orderly noticed him his body was coated with ice, drops of blood, converted into coloured stones—on his sheepskin

coat, on his hands, on the snow. Red Army men from the new division marched by. They were smiling cheerfully and animatedly; all knew that the Germans were being chased. On catching sight of dead Lukutin several of the older men walked up and stood silent for a moment—each filled with his own thoughts; then they ran to catch up with their comrades.

* 19 *

Gee, isn't it cold! The murky sun looks like a piece of ice. The snow is so dazzling white that it makes the eyes ache. And the shadows are violet... The cold makes you gasp, white vapour emerges from the mouth and hangs helplessly in the air. And the smoke cannot rise, disperse—those are burning villages. Everybody is thinking of one thing, speaking of one thing: "We are attacking!" All-powerful, with tanks and chocolate, with Thermopylae, with death's-heads on their sleeves, with "Messers," with Portuguese sardines, with "New Europe," with Jaegers and grenadiers, with sergeant-majors and field marshals, with the Führer, and they themselves, the invincibles, Siegfrieds, demigods, are hurriedly retreating.

They are abandoning brand new "Opels," plywood arches, French champagne, long-range guns, frivolous postcards and even binoculars—perhaps the very ones through which they had seen Moscow as plain as on the palm of your hand?...

Everybody feels merry in spite of the fact that the cold manages to creep under his sheepskins. Sergei cannot cast out the following lines that have embedded themselves in his mind:

*A Russian maiden's earliest passion
Is only in snowdrifts nurtured.
Rose-cheeked cold and blizzards...*

"Can't get them out of my mind. I don't even know where they come from, and they are silly—what 'maiden'? But the frost certainly does pinch. Why do they say that the winter is 'lifeless'? There is a mysterious passion in it, it burns the heart as iron burns—the fingers... The Germans must be feeling pretty rotten."

Then the newspapers reported the storming of Ivashkovo—that had started the division's march westward, they described the excellent marksmanship of the artillerymen, the élan of the infantry, and how the Divisional Commander had thought out everything beforehand. There was nothing in the newspapers about the sappers; but it was the sappers who started it—the Germans had mined the approaches to Ivashkovo, it had been necessary to creep up very quietly and remove the mines. It had been a moonlit night. How Sergei had cursed that silly moon!...

Ivashkovo is far behind. Now the sappers have their own chief concern—the road. That was the road of the offensive; they run on and the sun sets right in front of them, the unfriendly, niggardly December sun. Everything is new—abandoned cars (“wait—what make?”), German signposts—you can’t tell what village it is, bottles with foreign labels, empty cigarette packets, scraps of highly coloured magazines, a cemetery with rows and rows of crosses—it looked as though the dead would begin to march....

“Finished,” said Khomenko. “Their marching days are over.” ...

New are the German corpses: they look like figures at a waxwork show. One is standing near a tree looking towards the East. Perhaps he is still quoting Nietzsche? Or calculating what he will bring from Moscow to his home in Würzburg, where he had gone to school (he never wore holes in his pants), where he had served in a bank (had never made a single mistake), had saved pfennigs, had treated his girl to acorn coffee and apple tart, and even in his sleep had never dreamed of Siberian sable or of Urals chrysoberyles. Later he became a conqueror, Jenghis Khan from Würzburg, Tamerlane in spectacles, with a fiancée who had two children.... He stands leaning against a birch tree, rosy-cheeked from the cold, alert, but dead. Others are lying with their faces in the snow, as on a pillow, or on their backs—dreamers, stargazers.... Sergei was striding through an enchanted forest—mutilated trees, webs of barbed wire, German dugouts, those grottoes of the Nibelungs, with portraits of cinema stars, with frozen excrement and blood. But they mined the place well (a sapper admitted this), it was necessary to verify, to test everything.

That merry fellow Khomenko blundered on a mine. How he had sung about his Ukraine! Even amidst the tense cold one saw visions of the black nights of the South, the white blossoms of the cherry trees, Oksana’s white breasts.... Sablin, always unshaved, with tiny, mole-like eyes, growled angrily:

“What they say is true—a sapper makes a mistake only once....”

They marched past a village which had been set on fire by the Germans. Near one pink heap stood a woman and children. The cold was frightful, and only these burning embers amidst the snow, as hard as stone, sustained life. All that had remained of the house was—warm ashes.... Here this woman had sung songs, had given birth to children, from here she had seen her husband off to the war.

“They set it on fire, the parasites. We shall freeze to death....”

The men said nothing: they had no words for this. Only Chernykh swore under his breath. He couldn’t understand why they should burn down the houses. He had a hut like that at home, and a wife and children like these. One can understand burning a town—it was war.... Guns are made, and afterwards they shoot.... But is a hut a military

objective? They sowed hemp, barley... Who has ever heard of children being flung out into cold weather like this! Has he no head on him, or what?... He's shameless! Anger welled up in the men's breasts like a tumour, it choked them. And Chernykh, softly, so that nobody should hear him, swore: "Oh the skunk! Parasite! The son-of-..."

They went on further. Again chimneys in place of houses. Starling boxes and black patches on the snow, that was all that was left of the villages. People crept out of ravines, out of forests, wandered around the ashes, complained. They told long, endless stories of grief, that merged, interwove, followed them.

Towards morning a strong, blinding blizzard blew. And these stories blew, lashing the heart.

"One of those skunks came... Took my little girl away..."

"They burned, burned everything..."

"The shameless one, he undressed the girl..."

"They tied up Auntie Masha by the hair..."

"They took Agafonov out and shot him, right here..."

"The boy didn't understand, he was crying, but he went up to him..."

The blizzard increased in intensity; snowdrifts grew, wandered, whirled. But the men marched, sometimes waist deep in snow, but they kept on marching.

On the fourth or fifth day an old woman told Sergei:

"This is where they left her. Played about with her... Tormented her to death..." She stopped speaking and then suddenly she began to wail: "Olyenka!..."

They disinterred the dead girl. She had no clothes on except for a felt boot on one of her legs. Neither wounds nor bruises. She seemed to be sleeping; she was beautiful in her sleep, like a marble statue of remote centuries—short legs, strong rounded torso, face broad and stern—high cheekbones, arched eyebrows, narrow eyes.

"Cover her up."

Sergei felt that something inside him was freezing. Of his numerous emotions, as devious as the veins on a leaf, of all he had formerly lived for, one thing remained—how I hate them! I would tear at their throats with my teeth... It is like passion—the temples throb, your knees tremble, you can't come to your senses.

From the opposite direction came prisoners under escort, wretched looking, freezing. But every man's heart burned: Look! There they are... But is it them? It was hard to believe—so bewildered, frightened, insignificant did they look. In summer forage caps, faces tied up—like old women with toothache, lame and halt, running noses, filthy, whimpering, repeating the word they had learned by heart, and which

had now become a prayer, "kaputt." Was it these who burned, raped and tortured?

One of them understood French. Sergei asked:

"Why did you come here?"

"I am a soldier, I was ordered. . . ."

"But you obeyed with pleasure, didn't you? You burned, killed? Why don't you answer?"

"I am a prisoner of war, Monsieur le Capitaine. I am in your power."

Sergei felt uneasy. Perhaps this one had not done anything. The German sensed that the Russian officer was embarrassed and began to talk rapidly:

"I didn't do anything bad. Orders are orders. If I had my own way I would have preferred to stay in Paris. We were all right there, everybody was so polite to us. . . ."

"That will do!"

The prisoner at once sprang to attention and stood petrified. Sergei stood lost in thought. As was always the case in moments of surprise or mental concentration, he threw his head back and screwed up his eyes. The prisoner was terrified:

"I won't be killed, will I, Monsieur le Capitaine?"

"Who will kill you? Nonsense. . . ."

"So I will live?"

Sergei laughed:

"Of course, if you don't fall sick. . . ."

"I am healthy, quite healthy. . . ."

Sergei waved his hand—go! But the German turned back:

"Monsieur le Capitaine, I am healthy, but of weak physique, I must not be put on heavy work."

Sergei's lip curled up with disgust. They had befouled Paris too. . . . Just now it made him sick to think of Paris. The day before a girl had smiled at him, but he had turned away—who knows, perhaps she had also smiled at the Germans? . . . He slept in a house that had survived and felt that he was suffocating: they had so stunk the place out that it could not be aired. . . . It's better out in the cold! . . . Zonin gave him a cigarette lighter: "You have no matches, have you? . . . And this is a cunning little gadget they've invented—see, it shields the light from the wind." . . . Sergei mechanically dropped the lighter into his pocket; later he suddenly found it in his pocket and he remembered—why, it's German! In his rage he trampled it in the snow—loathsome thing!

Only a month ago war had been a frightful necessity for him, the collision between two worlds, defence of his Motherland, strategy, tactics, feats of heroism. Now the war had become life; everything in

him was at war—his blood, gall, breath, every joint in his body, every beat of his heart.

It looked as though the offensive had come to a halt. The Germans were no longer snarling back, but trying to make a stand. Real structures. . . . Have we really petered out? . . . Colonel Glukhov said to Sergei: "We'll stay here for about a week." . . . Sergei thought only of one thing: push on further! . . . He tried to bring himself to reason, played chess with Zonin, talked with the men—about Moscow, about the distant villages in the Trans-Volga, about children, about ordinary everyday life. But he thought only about the Germans.

To Valya he wrote rarely. She had receded way back into the past, into that warm, dense, motley past when it had been possible to fall in love, to forget, to argue about theatres (which was better—the Vakhtangov or the Kamerny?), to dream among the maple trees. In that remote world, which was like a well-remembered dream, Valya was side by side with Mado. He now recalled Paris often, recalled it with a sad smile—Germans were strolling along the avenue down which he had walked with Mado, were sitting on the bench under the chestnut trees, were interfering in their important and senseless conversation. "A sapper makes a mistake only once." . . . He was not dead. Nor is Mado dead. He has Valya. . . . Perhaps Mado is married now, has settled down, and is happy? What does she care about the Germans, she used to say: "I hate politics." . . . He had taken a Paris newspaper from a prisoner. A ballet, something about André Gide, the opening of an exhibition of pictures by Derain. . . . Corbeille was continuing. The opening of the exhibition—Mado. After all, the Germans were connoisseurs, art patrons, refined. . . .

For shame! How can one blacken love? He is guilty on all points. He had deserted Mado. He has not written Valya for two weeks. But Valya is—his life, . . . He is angry with himself and wants to blacken Mado. You can't believe what the Fritzes say. That workingman at Roche aîné—I will never believe that he has become reconciled. . . . He had a funny tuft. . . . He asked about Stalin, about Moscow, he is a good lad and a real Frenchman. Such a one will not become a turncoat. It is harder for them—after all, we are together, but there one must fight alone. . . . The damned Fritzes! . . . He now spoke like his men, "Fritzes." Until very recently he had expected that Anna's friends, honest Germans, disgusted with their army, would come running, walking, creeping over to our side and say "we are with you." . . . But none were to be seen. . . . If one did come over, it could at once be seen that he was simply scared. "Katyusha"—that's the conscience that is pricking them! . . . Too bad. We shall smash them. . . . Even Hitler understands this now, if he is capable of understanding anything. But I cannot be what I was before. . . . Religious people thought that the

fruit of the tree of knowledge is sweet. But it is better to do without such fruit, after eating it life is no longer sweet. Zonin said: "You and I have become wiser, we have learned a lot." That's true, of course. But we have also unlearned something. . . .

He wanted to write to Valya, but nothing came of it; he wrote to Nina Georgiyevna, told her about the offensive, the burned villages, his talk with the prisoner. He wanted to write about the murdered girl, but he could not, and instead of that he added: "You would not recognize me, Mama. I realize now how childish and vague I was in many things, how many foolish fantasies I had. I have changed very much, I want to do only one thing now—to slaughter them all. I know that this will subside, as always happens—time pours water into the wine, but this wine is so strong, so bitter, that it will need much time and much, very much water." . . .

Two days later Sergei was taken to the hospital—a shell splinter had entered his shoulder. The surgeon said: "It will all be healed—in two or three weeks." Sergei exclaimed with impatience: "Three weeks?" . . . The surgeon laughed: "What's the hurry? We'll be fighting for a long time yet." . . .

He did not know Sergei. And Sergei himself was mistaken once again: he thought he had changed, but it was time that had changed; he had remained the same as he was before—ardent, marching just a little faster than was necessary and, perhaps, an inch or so off the ground.

* 20 *

Richter could not get warm, try as he might; he was shivering. He shouted to the old woman who had her head covered with a black kerchief:

"Put more wood in, do you understand, more wood! . . ."

The woman did not understand German; she glanced furtively at Richter, blew into the stove and raked the fire with a poker. The damp wood smoked. Richter got up in a rage, seized a wooden stool, smashed it up and threw the fragments into the stove. The fire blazed up at once. Richter began to hack the bench with an axe. The woman burst into loud sobs and ran out of the hut. Cockroach laughed:

"One would think it was valuable furniture! Rococo!"

Richter felt that he was thawing; he smiled blissfully, wiped his nose on a dirty handkerchief. He said to Marabou:

"Sit here—it's almost like paradise in here. Look what has become of us! Like a fairy tale, but speaking frankly, it's a rotten tale."

Cockroach still preserved his military smartness and a certain amount of cheerfulness.

"A rotten story, I admit, but we shall make up for it in the spring. How long can cold weather like this last?..."

Richter answered:

"Their winter ends in April, by that time we can freeze to death a hundred times. What interests me personally is something else—when will the Russians come to an end?"

"Their end will come," says Marabou. "But this is a fatal duel for our generation. We are doomed. It is enough to look at the landscape to see how we will end.... It is difficult to imagine greater harmony between nature and events."

"I don't see anything particular except the crows, snow and wretched little houses," growled Cockroach. He knew that Marabou was a real Nazi and a good soldier, but he could not stand his philosophizing—he buried one alive. Is that fitting for a soldier?...

Marabou shrugged his shoulders—he was talking to Richter.

"Look—the sun, snow, vacancy. There is death in absolutely everything—in that pale disc, in that hospital whiteness, in the immobility...."

Richter said nothing. No matter what you talked about, Marabou always led the talk to death. And one's nerves were worn to a frazzle even without that.... In three days they had lost sixteen men. This morning Klepper was killed. The boy was afraid of lagging behind, climbed into a truck and—a direct hit.... The Russians have good artillery. Richter recalled what Colonel Wilke had said about "semi-peaceful penetration" and swore loudly.

Cockroach also swore—he found a louse on himself. He took his shirt off and began to crush the vermin, counting as he did so: "Seven Jews.... Eight.... Nine...."

"Everything is clear now," thought Richter. "They will defend themselves like maniacs. Perhaps we shall settle their hash next summer, but how many of us will survive?... To tell the truth, just now it's all the same to me who wins. I want to take a bath, put on pyjamas and get into a warm bed. Even without Hilde.... I feel warm now, and if anybody were to say that victory was lying outside the house I wouldn't go out.... Haven't we won enough victories? We have captured Brest, Minsk, we have captured Smolensk, Vyazma, and some other places, I can't remember all the names. We have been near Moscow, and even now it is not so far away.... I'm fed up with it all—win victories, retreat, crawl on your hands and knees under fire, bury your comrades, listen to Marabou's croaking, or to Cockroach boasting that he has slept with three girls...."

During the first weeks of the war Richter had displayed curiosity; he had then felt like a tourist travelling in an exotic country, dangerous, of course, but interesting. He was adding to his knowledge about Russia. During his first trip he had seen only Moscow and Kuznetsk. And what

had he seen there? Hotels, museums, building operations. Now he could go into any house. He was seeing the Russian countryside. A backward people, they ought to bless us, we can introduce them to civilization. We will commence by building decent lavatories. One day he wrote to Hilde: "You can't imagine what this country is like, I have been to Russia twice and could not picture this. We spent the night in a peasant's house, suddenly I heard strange noises. It turned out that the calf was kept in the house at night, the mistress told us through an interpreter that they had to do that during the severely cold weather, otherwise the animal would freeze. An eccentric picture, isn't it?—a Berlin architect, an enthusiast for urbanism, spending the night with a cow."...

Sometimes he argued with Bauer, who said: "Every nation has its own way of life. They like tea and I like coffee, but guns don't decide anything.... Now they have no tea and we have no coffee."... Richter answered condescendingly: "You can't approach world history with the mentality of a housewife. We must achieve victory in order to enlighten."... Bauer could not understand this, he was a drawing master in a girls' school and had spent all his life painting pansies on porcelain.

Later Richter stopped wondering at Russian habits: everything irritated him, especially the fanaticism with which the Russians were defending themselves. They attached no value to their lives, that's natural—of what value is the life of ants? But while dying themselves, they are destroying the flower of German culture....

On catching sight of some Red Army prisoners of war, Richter went up and scanned their faces—a funny idea entered his head: perhaps Lukutin was among them?... The prisoners stood huddled together. Richter looked at them and felt anger rise in his breast: stupid faces, they look at you like wild beasts, dumb.... He recalled that on the previous day Russian scouts had killed Non-Com Bauer and in his fury he punched one of the prisoners in the face. Then he wiped his hand, sticky with blood, and went away. Disgusting!...

They had expected Moscow to fall any day. The officers had said that it was a foregone conclusion, that it was already known which divisions were to take part in the parade, that an attempt had been made to keep their division out of it, but Colonel Schultze had put the matter right.... But instead of marching in a parade they had been compelled to run away. They had been in the second echelon, Richter was calmly shaving when the panic unexpectedly broke out. He forgot his shaving brush, it was a good one—real badger, couldn't get another one like it....

Now he had no inclination even to shave. He had not washed for a long time, he stank awfully, especially when he lay down with his greatcoat pulled over his head.... You scratch yourself like a mangy

cur. Marabou still took notes and tried to keep a brave face. But the others—like Richter—all they cared about was filling their bellies and keeping warm. The only thing that linked Richter with life were Hilde's letters. She wrote every other day and numbered her letters. He knew those long pale-yellow envelopes very well. And she scented the paper with the same old Parisian perfume. . . . He pressed the sheets to his lips and it seemed to him that Hilde was by his side. God knows what she was doing! Perhaps it's the tenth lover she has now, I wouldn't be surprised. She is like a cat, she must have that, but I am far away, impossible to say when I will come back, or whether I will come back at all. . . . Even jealousy could not enliven him, he was jealous listlessly, reluctantly, sometimes picturing to himself obscene scenes, now bestowing endearing names and now coarse abuse upon Hilde.

He was fed up with everything. . . . He felt a sharp twinge of pain in his stomach. What have I eaten? Must be from the cold. . . . He didn't dare to go out into the cold, he went into a corner and, looking round guiltily, squatted on his haunches.

Somebody swore:

"That's a rotten thing to do, after all, you are not here alone! . . ."

Richter answered in a tearful voice:

"I'm unwell, do you understand? . . ."

He thought to himself: it is a hell of a business—like a savage! . . . Still, it's a good thing I didn't go out—couldn't get warm again in an hour. That's something to write to Hilde about. . . . He recalled her bedroom, the blue silk quilt and bottles of perfume, and he laughed.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Cockroach.

"I'm thinking that we shall be able to make a lot of money in Berlin—we'll rig up a Veteran of the Russian Winter Cabin and charge twenty pfennigs for admission. . . ."

"Meanwhile, the veteran of the Russian winter feels hungry," said Cockroach.

They made coffee and took out some canned food. Richter wanted to abstain—he was afraid of getting diarrhoea again, but later he snatched a sardine with his fingers and smacked his lips with satisfaction.

The interpreter Braun came in. He can smell at once where refreshments are going, thought Richter, but he magnanimously said to Braun: "Dig in. . . ." Braun related that only women with children and old people had been left in the village, that the field gendarmes had taken the men away.

"What's the name of this village?" asked Richter languidly.

"Golovlyovo."

"Easier to capture than pronounce. . . ."

Richter ate his fill and lit up. Only now did he look round the hut—nothing interesting, he had seen hundreds like them—an ikon, a rough table, a stove, and on it rags, clay pots and bowls. A woman

in a black kerchief, two little girls with thin plaits. Nothing to look at. . . . Suddenly, among the pots on a shelf, he saw a book in greasy covers.

"Oh, a library, if you please! A pity the calf is not here, it might have read to us. . . . Here, Braun, tell us what opus this is? I can't get accustomed to their crazy alphabet."

"It's a novel, *Anna Karenina*. I saw it at the movies."

"Funny. . . . What does she want a book for—to light the fire with? . . ."

The woman was frightened and did not answer at once. The interpreter shouted:

"What do you want this book for?"

"It's my daughter's book, she came to visit me from Smolensk before the war, she is studying, she's a student. . . ."

"A student?" Richter roared with laughter. "Well, well, well, higher education, if you please! Tolstoy! She would do better if she built a toilet that one didn't freeze in."

"Well, since she hasn't built one, I'll go outside," said Cockroach. "Otherwise we shall suffocate here. . . ."

He came hurrying back at once:

"Fall in! The Lieutenant said that the Russians have broken through. We've got to guard Headquarters."

Richter emitted a prolonged yawn:

"The swine, don't give us a chance to get warm!"

* 21 *

"Where do you intend to celebrate New Year's Eve, Monsieur Schirke?" enquired Bertie.

"At home. At a time like this every hour one spends in one's family circle is precious. I told you, didn't I, that my wife has come here for two months?"

"I hope Madame Schirke likes Paris. . . ."

They were in le Chapon d'Or. Before the war this had been a humble restaurant frequented by the employees of a neighbouring bank. But now it was not an easy matter to get in, the neophytes of gastronomy—speculators, contractors, minor journalists who served the Germans, variety artists, all humbly begged to have tables reserved for them. It was said that the owner of the restaurant was connected with the Gestapo and that was why it was possible to get here what you could not get anywhere else. The Germans, however, rarely looked in, and this too served to heighten the establishment's reputation: the people who collaborated with the Germans preferred to spend their leisure without them.

Berty had chosen this restaurant because he knew that Schirke was fond of good food; an unpleasant talk was in prospect, and a tasty dish and a bottle of old wine help to smooth out matters. Berty had long forgotten Schirke's coarse sally that had shocked Mado so; much had changed since then, the war in the East had clarified things. Berty met Schirke often and began to respect him: there were no few sensible and knowledgable men among the Germans but they were by no means brilliant intellects; Schirke, perhaps, was an exception. . . . Schirke, in his turn, had a high opinion of Berty—he was a Frenchman who could not be easily fooled. . . . They behaved towards each other like two gamblers, each wanted to outwit the other and admired his partner's cunning.

Berty asked Schirke whether he was fond of oysters—the Germans, he opined, were not accustomed to eating shellfish. . . . Schirke nodded.

"You have French tastes. But your perseverance is German. . . ."

By this Berty wanted to show that he knew what Schirke was going to talk about. The Germans were demanding something akin to love, but they themselves were not taking a step to meet us. I shall tell him everything. . . . But first of all I must order the dinner.

"Yes, truite anneau, if you say it is tender. Then, of course, chapon. Pâté à la Périgord. . . . Have you any Meursault? Nineteen twenty-one? Excellent. And Châteauneuf—what you gave me the last time I was, here."

"And so you are beginning to understand Napoleon's troubles?" Berty said this in a jesting tone in order to soften the irony of the question.

Schirke squeezed a slice of lemon, he did not answer at once—he swallowed an oyster, took a sip of Meursault and then laughed:

"Yes, if you wish to know. . . . Yesterday I looked through von Zukkov's memoirs. There is some resemblance. Of all the Russian generals I respect one—General Frost. . . . Strong as our army may be, nature is nature. The importance of the hitch must be neither minimized nor exaggerated. We shall lose six months, there's no disputing that. When the newspapers describe this almost like a victory for us they overrate the credulity of their readers. But it is ridiculous to become pessimistic. You know the song: 'December is followed by May.' . . . We shall resume the offensive in the spring. We have several months in which to make thorough preparations. The game will be finished in the summer."

Berty thought to himself: he weighs up the situation correctly. . . . One must be a fool to believe that it is possible for the Russians to win. Events near Moscow have created a profound impression, of course—it was the first German reverse. But there need be no doubt about the final issue, the Reds have only obtained a respite. . . .

Nevertheless, Berty made a rejoinder, he wanted to rub in the reverse the Germans had sustained.

"Are you so sure about next summer, Monsieur Schirke? I am not a German newspaper reader and I do not suffer from excessive credulity. In my opinion you are wrong in putting all the blame on the frost. It was not only the cold that caused Napoleon's undoing, he had failed to take into account the fanaticism of the Russian muzhiks. Granted that everything was decided by the temperature in December, but you were marking time also in November...."

He thought that this would rile Schirke and prepared for an argument. But Schirke, after swallowing the last oyster, said:

"You are right, the fanaticism of the Russians is an important factor. They have been deliberately trained that way.... Now everybody can see what a menace Russia was. Do you think Bolshevism threatens only us?... Here everything is at stake—either we annihilate them, or the Communists will come. In that case, you and I will not get any trout like this. We, Monsieur Berty, will hang side by side—on two posts...."

Berty laughed—how skilfully Schirke had turned the conversation! Obviously they will play the Red menace. And before Schirke could speak again, Berty launched his attack:

"Just now Germany needs collaboration, and you are doing everything to repel us. I shall not mention the tactlessness of those red posters with the black borders.... The French do not and never will understand this system of hostages. I don't know what is more foolish—to shoot children like Mocquet's son, or solemnly announce it to the French? I have told you that I can ensure order in my factories. Your Gestapo men are making a fuss about sabotage. That is foolish. I am short of workers—you are holding them in the prisoner-of-war camps. I have to take on novices. Naturally, breakdowns occur. Not long ago an Algerian put a machine out of commission. That is a trifle.... Why make a fuss about it? You only get the workers' backs up. I talked to your authorities and they answered that I was behaving 'evasively.' If you want motor trucks, leave me in peace.... Try the Châteauneuf, it is a rare vintage...."

Schirke rolled the wine round his tongue and his face flushed with pleasure.

"An exceptionally rare vintage!... In general, I love Rhône wines, they have a twang, you can feel the southern sun.... You are wrong in getting angry, the Gestapo is the Gestapo, all the police forces in the world have done, do, and will do foolish things. And if the French industrialists refuse to collaborate with us they will lose. They will lose whichever side wins. When we win, we will remember who was really with us and who simply waited. At the worst—the Reds will win. That will be a disaster for you, too. Do you think I don't know the attitude of the French towards us?... I am not a big man, I am not Abetz, I am not a general, not a Gestapo man, but still I feel it. An actress

is introduced to me, suddenly she runs off, she has nervous spasms, you see. . . . A friend of yours, a factory director, we will call him X, tells me that he wants to go into the country and breed rabbits. Look round, if you please. They are eating, drinking and laughing. They are happy thanks to us. Would they be able to dine like this in London, or in Moscow? But ask them, and they will say that they are happy in spite of us. Nobody knows me here, and these profiteers are glad they can eat capon without having Boches in front of them. . . . I have lived long enough, I am able to understand and to forgive. But has this Monsieur X thought of what awaits him if the German army falters? He is dreaming about nineteen eighteen, with Clemenceau and illuminations at Versailles. But if we are beaten he will get Cossacks and the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Berty listened, smiling to himself: X, that's me, he wants to say that I am playing a double game. Let's hear what tune he will sing when I remind him that the Communists are not the only opponents of the Germans. . . .

"Russia is enfeebled, and will remain so for a long time. Even if you are defeated the Bolsheviks will not be a menace, they will not cross their own frontier. You are wrong in harping on the East all the time. Many Frenchmen are looking in another direction. America has entered the war, and the Americans have vast resources. I don't know who this X is that you talk about, I take him as an example—why should he fear a victory for the Americans? He will be able to work and live as he did before the war. It is not surprising if he prefers dollars not only to rubles, but even to marks. . . ."

Schirke enjoyed the pâté and truffles. Berty was a strong opponent, that couldn't be denied! He wants to say that he can put his stakes on the Allies. . . . It would be interesting to see how he would behave not in le Chapon d'Or but in the Avenue Foch, if he were interrogated, just for once, by real Gestapo men. . . . But that cannot be done, we must manoeuvre. . . .

Coffee was served, fragrant and so strong that it made the heart palpitate. Schirke said:

"The Americans and the English are also interested in the defeat of the Reds. They send the Russians telegrams of sympathy, but hope that we will annihilate them. . . . It will then be possible to divide up the world. You may reach agreement with Messerschmitt or with Ford, but not with the Bolsheviks. . . . I don't want you to express your solidarity with the Reich. You—are a Frenchman, you have your own interests. I expect something else from you—assistance in our war in the East. There we are also defending Monsieur X. Say openly, not tête-à-tête, but in the press, that France's chief enemy is—Communism. We will be satisfied with that. . . ."

A month ago Schirke had demanded that Berty should make a public

statement urging closer collaboration with Germany and the desirability of victory for her. Now he was more moderate. He had been obliged to retreat.... Smiling, he thought to himself: as was the case near Moscow....

Berty weighed up in his mind: should he accept such a proposal or not? Of course, the Communists are—enemy No. 1. This was elementary truth. But the whole point is, when you are saying this, and to whom....

"I am no admirer of the Communists. But I don't admire your methods either. It is enough to smile, or to cough, for you to interpret it as a declaration. You are too much taken up with propaganda.... I could denounce Communism.... But you must return to the conditions that prevailed before August—no control! Unless you do, you will get no trucks. Where's the sense in denouncing Bolshevism if I cannot make my small contribution to the cause of victory over the Reds?"

The rascal, thought Schirke.... But on the whole, he is right—we have too many authorities. The Gestapo refuses to reckon with the Army, the Army refuses to reckon with the civil authorities, Stülpnagel doesn't understand Abetz, and Abetz is riled over Saukel's zeal.... They listen to what I have to say—and do the opposite. I—am an old Nazi, but now I am a pawn....

"Very well, Monsieur Berty, I shall convey your wishes to the proper quarters. Thanks for a pleasant evening. I don't know what's making my head go round—that armagnac? Or.... (He laughed loudly.) Or Monsieur X's resourcefulness?..."

They parted friends. On taking his leave Berty requested Schirke to smooth out the matter with Roche aîné:

"My father-in-law is a hundred per cent Frenchman. Happy-go-lucky, lazy and a gourmet.... His is a small plant, but he is doing his bit.... They have pounced upon him like ravens on carrion."

Next day Lancier came to see Berty: for the tenth time he began to complain:

"Alpert is the most honest of men, but I dismissed him long ago, I don't even meet him. But that Roy...."

Berty interrupted him:

"I hope it will all be cleared up."

As always, he was reserved, amiable, smiled, toyed with the blown glass pigeon that stood on his writing desk.

Lancier was lucky: just then Schirke telephoned.

"...Thanks, and you?... Yes, I am listening. Yes.... As it was before August. When will they be withdrawn?... Is that definite?... All right, I am willing to see him—it would be better if it were in the form of an interview.... No, only after everything is carried out as promised.... Straightened out? Thank you.... I hope to see you at my house soon...."

Berty again took up the pigeon. Lancier thought to himself admiringly: what slender hands he has! What a model for Greco—Ruler with Plaything....

"Schirke has just told me that your business has been settled."

Lancier choked with gratitude:

"You have saved me again!... I am so much indebted to you.... I am happy that Mado chose you.... I will go at once and tell her that you...."

"She is not at home. She has gone away for several days."

"Gone away?... I saw her yesterday, but she did not tell me anything. Where could she have gone?..."

"To the winter sports."

Berty was still smiling. Suddenly there was a tinkle of broken glass—he had squeezed the pigeon too hard. Lancier saw blood on his son-in-law's hand.

"Good God, you have cut yourself.... August, where are you?... Bring the iodine, quickly.... Monsieur Berty has cut himself...."

Berty dismissed the valet, tied his hand up with his handkerchief and politely saw Lancier to the door:

"I have a lot of work to do. Those Germans don't give me a moment's peace...."

* 22 *

They spent the night at Dr. Vacher's house—Jacques, Anna and Marie. It was a safe place: nobody could suspect that the doctor was sheltering "terrorists." Jacques had said: "He'll give us a meal and we'll have a good sleep."

Dr. Vacher was a specialist in women's ailments, he had never interested himself in politics; he read the newspapers only for the sensational trials and the serial novels. He punctually sent his bills to his patients: he also had a secret source of income—his cottage in Suresnes was bought with money he had made from abortions. His wife had died long ago, his son, an engineer, lived in Lille. The doctor lived alone, the only diversion he had was Lulu, his housekeeper's granddaughter. He was grieved when the Germans came, but soon became accustomed to the new conditions, received patients, clipped the trees in his garden, played lotto with Lulu. When he was asked where his son was—a prisoner of war or at large, he would answer: "I don't know. We rarely corresponded even before the war. What would you have? We are two grown-up men. Neither of us is sentimental..."

In the beginning of November a stranger came to see Vacher:

"I want to speak to you—privately...."

Vacher thought it was a case of an abortion.

"Wait. I must first attend to two patients."

Later he invited Jacques into his receiving room.

"Yes, what can I do for you."

Jacques said bluntly:

"The Germans have shot your son. He asked us to give you this ring. He said it was his mother's...."

Vacher's face betrayed no emotion.

"Did they shoot him accidentally? ... Or for some misdemeanor? ..."

"He was a Communist. He died like a man...."

Jacques wanted to go, but Vacher detained him:

"Stay with me awhile. ... We'll have dinner together."

Jacques thought the doctor would ask him how his son had fought, or drop into reminiscences, but the doctor said nothing. At dinner he talked about the weather, he said that Lulu had the mumps, complained about the blackout—"I nearly broke my leg last night." ... Jacques talked about Vichy, about Laval; Vacher shook his head:

"I don't understand anything about that. ... I didn't know that Henri was a Communist. Strange. ... He earned good money, was not in need. ... Perhaps you, too, are a Communist?"

Jacques nodded. The doctor poured him out some coffee.

"I have some left over from before the war. ... I don't drink coffee myself, it gives me insomnia...."

His face twitched, he said:

"Now I have no heir. For whom have I been working?"

He quietly regained his self-control.

"If you want me to do anything for you, I will do it. ... My house is at your disposal. ..." After a pause he added: "I don't know whether Henri was right or wrong. But I shall never forgive the Germans for this. ..."

This was not the first time that Jacques had brought his friends to this place. Just now he changed his heavy damp boots for the doctor's bedroom slippers, sank into a deep armchair and stretched:

"It's fine to have a good sleep at least once in a month...."

He drew a small leaflet from his pocket and gave it to Anna:

"You haven't seen this, have you? It is a Soviet communiqué. They have exterminated eighty-five thousand Germans near Moscow."

Marie smiled:

"I like the way they say 'exterminated,' as if they were speaking about vermin. ... Are they human? Sometimes I am surprised that they have eyebrows, moustaches, that they talk and laugh...."

She stopped short and glanced in confusion at Anna: I've forgotten again! ... Anna did not turn away; there was neither reproach nor resentment in her large grey eyes, there was only that steady and customary sadness.

Her comrades often forgot that she was a—German. Jacques, in jest, called her “white raven.” But she herself did not forget this for a single moment. She carried out difficult and dangerous assignments: from time to time she put on a grey uniform and became Lotte Hünner in military service. Then French passers-by glanced at her with hatred or contempt, and urchins shouted after her, “grey mouse.” Anna went to the cinema or to the army club, struck up acquaintance with officers, flirted, smiled, danced, and tried to learn what units had arrived in France and which had been despatched to the Eastern Front; she memorized the numbers of regiments, the names of majors and colonels. All this she communicated to Jacques. Looking at her in the dance hall nobody would say that she was in torment, she looked like a happy girl who had come to Paris for the first time. When a young officer was too persistent she would say to him coily: “Don’t, honey. . . . I have a young man, he is in Russia now, he may be killed, and I would never forgive myself if I were unfaithful to him.”. . .

None of her comrades guessed how much spiritual strength this game called for. Only Luc remarked one day: “She is working splendidly. . . . To tell the truth, Jacques, I would not like to be in her shoes. . . .”

Jacques was right, Vacher gave them a good meal. The doctor himself ate almost nothing (“I try not to eat at night, I sleep better for it”), he poured out wine for his guests and in a dull, monotonous tone related the contents of the last novel he had read: “Stevens had no suspicion that the fingerprints on the casket may have been due to the fact that Eve had shifted it when the necklace was no longer in it.”. . . Marie yawned, and as soon as they rose from the table she went to bed.

Anna reported to Jacques:

“The Seventy-first is being sent from Reims to Russia. I talked to the Lieutenant, they are in an awful mood, particularly after it was announced that they were ‘shortening the front.’ The Fifty-ninth Regiment has just arrived in Besançon, or rather, the remnants of it—it was almost entirely wiped out near Yelnya. They are glad they managed to get away from there; the men have been ordered not to talk about Russia to prevent the spread of demoralization. They are expecting the arrival here of two divisions from the Ukraine to be re-formed, I will try to get their numbers the day after tomorrow. . . . An incomplete division—two regiments—that’s the Three Hundred Twenty-seventh, has been sent from Nancy. . . . In Lille, General Draser has had a nervous breakdown, they called in a doctor and he said it was due to fear—the General is afraid of being assassinated. . . . The morale of the SS men is still good, they say they will defeat the Russians in the spring. By the way, they are recruiting Belgians for the Viking Division. . . . The Fourth Tank Division is to be despatched after the twentieth of January. . . . I think that’s all.”

Jacques jotted all this down. Then he said to Anna:

"We must remove a Gestapo man. I'm thinking about Scheller.... It can be some other man. Find out where he goes—to the café or to the cinema."

"Why find out? I can do it myself...."

"What?..."

"Remove him."

"No, we need you. Here it will be difficult to get away...."

Anna could not fall asleep, she vaguely but intensely thought to herself: why don't they let me do it? It is easier than dancing with them. And after that—the end. How long can they torture me? A day, a week.... What happiness it is—to die! To fall asleep never to wake again.... I cannot fall asleep.... Half-past five, it will be time to go soon, he has an appointment at nine.... I must not fall asleep.... I must not die, I must lie around, wait, dance....

Several days later Anna spent the night at Professor Dumas'. She tried to go to him as rarely as possible for fear of drawing suspicion upon him. But Jacques had given a wrong address, she did not know where to go, and so she went to Dumas. The professor was overjoyed:

"I am living like a badger. Were it not for the radio I could just go and hang myself.... Well, what do you say to it? That mad corporal has decided to follow in Napoleon's footsteps in everything. I can picture to myself how they are wintering there!... Last summer a lout came to visit me, a colleague in a way—anthropologist, abandoned science and decided to go and capture cities. He came to see me, they were sending them to some place or other, and, incidentally, said such things that I kicked him out. I would like to take a look at him now as he is scooting from Moscow.... The Russians—are fine! We collapsed, and how; but they have held out. It's different when a people is united. We haven't even got a people. Pétain shakes hands with their psychopath while they are killing schoolchildren. Everybody is informing against everybody else. I don't even know what kind of neighbours I've got. People are afraid to talk to each other. Do you call that a people? It is half a people, the other half has fizzled out...."

They were sitting in front of a tiny stove. Dumas threw some coals on the fire and lit his pipe. To her own surprise Anna said:

"You don't know how happy you are! Now I really have no people...."

This was the first time during this period that she gave utterance to the thought that was torturing her.

"Perhaps you remember—it was before the war, a Soviet engineer was a guest at Lancier's. There was an argument then about whether the Russians would be able to fight. He saw me home and we had a long talk.... He said that he understood my position. But what is he thinking now when the Germans are looting, burning, killing?... You say there

are many traitors among you, but you know that—traitor means being against the people. But where are the German people?... When I was in Spain I still believed they could come to their senses, there I saw different Germans. How many were there? A handful. But now I see these every day, talk to them. They buy perfumes, go to the theatre, have learned to choose wines. . . . I heard a French woman say 'they are vermin'; the horrible thing is that it is true! Why, I think in their language, I grew up there. . . . I can have no other country. There is a land, but no people. . . ."

"Nonsense! How can a people vanish? They have gone mad, that's clear. But I will never believe that the Germans have this in their blood. I am an anthropologist, you won't convert me into a racist. What are you? A German or an Australian? I admire you, do you understand—I admire you! The Germans will come to their senses, if not in a year then in ten years' time, but they will certainly come to their senses, they will work, philosophize, make music. Then they will remember people like you. . . . I can understand how painful it is to you that you are now so few. But even in the elementary schools they teach you that—it is possible to lose men but not the banner. . . . I am not a Communist, I am of a different mould. . . . But I know you are a Communist, that is something more than being a German. You did not choose your origin, but you did choose this. . . . I do not believe in Jesus Christ, my mother did. . . . But when I read about the martyrs it affects even me. I ask you, who today is capable of sacrificing himself for the sake of ideas? Only those who think like you. Take care, don't give way to melancholy, you will yet be needed—there. . . . And now Marie will make your bed, you'll need a hot water bottle, it's frightfully cold here. . . ."

Dumas had said all this in a growling tone, puffing at his pipe; his gruff kindly voice soothed Anna. She soon fell asleep, and next morning it seemed to her that on the night before, before falling asleep, she had wept. On parting Dumas embraced her.

"Be very careful—take care of yourself. . . ."

She hurried to Gilet, where she kept her "grey mouse" uniform. That evening she danced with an SS man. Next day she spent six hours at a cinema in the Champs-Élysées. She had no luck. She was about to give up the assignment when on the fifth day of dancing, flirting, suppers and feverish searching she was introduced to Captain Kolle who ranked as Scheller's second-in-command. The Captain had the blue pathetic eyes of a very short-sighted and absent-minded man. Anna was in an unusual state of excitement, insisted on having champagne, laughed one moment, and at another, trustfully squeezed Kolle's hand and whispered:

"I'm so happy I have met you! I am very lonely in Paris. . . . I am not a soldier like you, but a feeble woman, I feel frightened here. . . ."

"What frightens you? Bombing?"

"No, the terrorists."

"Don't let them frighten you, they've got their tails between their legs now. A few more operations—and you will forget they ever existed. Lieutenant-Colonel Scheller knows how to talk to them..."

"He must be a hero. . . . I would so much like to see him! He's not a young man, is he?..."

"Careful now!" Kolle laughed. "I'm jealous. Scheller can still turn the head of any girl. If we become friends I will show him to you. He is a connoisseur of beautiful women, Havana cigars and Burgundy wine. He dines at Jean's every day only because they have excellent wine there..."

Anna pouted:

"I am jealous too—I don't like men who can forget women for the sake of wine. I prefer you, Captain, truly I do..."

* 23 *

"A happy New Year to you, Monsieur Pepe," said Vacher solemnly. He was wearing a black jacket and a starched collar with a bow.

At the table, besides Pepe, sat the old housekeeper and Marie. Vacher, pleased that he had guests on an evening like this, tried to keep smiling, and kept pouring out the champagne.

"Wealth is trash, believe an old man. And I don't think fame is any sweeter—you may be pelted with flowers one day and spat at the next. Happiness lies in peace of mind. I wish you peace of mind, Monsieur Pepe."

The housekeeper shook her head:

"You have forgotten what youth is, Monsieur Vacher. One wants to sleep at night, not in the morning... Look what a wife Monsieur Pepe has, that's happiness! Permit me to drink to your lasting union..."

Marie felt shy and, as was always the case with her, she began to laugh from shyness. She raised her glass:

"A happy New Year, Pepe!"

Yes, even Marie now called him Pepe. It was only at rare moments, when they were alone together, that, kissing him with feverish passion, she whispered: "Jeannot! . . . My Jeannot! . . ." Why was this Parisian lad who had never been further than Fontainebleau given a Spanish name? This had been last winter when they had only just started work; Jacques had collected four comrades, none of whom he knew, and on setting eyes on Milet he asked: "Are you a Spaniard?" They all laughed. And Milet became Pepe.

Vacher, however, did remember what youth is. he saw how Pepe

and Marie looked at each other, and when supper was over he did not detain them.

"We will sit a little longer," he said to the housekeeper. "Our guests are tired. Take them to my bedroom. I will sleep in my receiving room tonight...."

The champagne had made Marie giddy, for some reason she felt very gay. As soon as the housekeeper left the room she burst into unrestrained laughter.

"Look at that bed! Have you ever slept in a bed like that? Look—an angel...."

"No, that's Cupid."

"It's all the same—it's got wings.... Awfully funny! It's not a bed, it's a throne, I shall dream that I am—the Queen of England."

"It looks more like a hearse to me...."

Marie stopped laughing.

"Do you know, I am afraid of that doctor. He has glassy eyes, and he doesn't speak, he creaks. He is a real Bluebeard...."

"You needn't be afraid of him. If Jacques says he's all right, we can sleep peacefully. Jacques understands absolutely everything. He must have worked on *l'Humanité* before the war.... I haven't met another man as clever as he.... Except Lejean.... Too bad they took him then!"

"But the prison was evacuated before the Germans came. If he is in the South, things, after all, are easier there—they are French...."

"What kind of French! They delivered Raymonde to the Boches. I don't know whom I hate more—the 'militia' or the Gestapo. If I were given the assignment to remove Doriot I would be happy. Of course. Scheller is a fine one, too.... Do you know what they did to Antoine? He managed to get a letter out.... They tortured him for four days, Scheller burned him with an electric flat iron.... I thought—today, but today—he's at home. That scoundrel has a family.... He spends four evenings with his family—Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve, his wife's birthday and Good Friday. Do you understand what a swine he is?... I was afraid he would get drunk today and would not come tomorrow, but Jacques said: 'He is as regular as a clock.'..."

As soon as they had entered the room Marie flung off her shoes and began to undress. Now she was sitting half undressed on the enormous high bed, her thin legs drawn up like a child's.... She was thinking about the most frightful thing: what would happen tomorrow? ...

But Pepe was gay, exhilarated.

"Do you understand what luck this is? I did not think we would be able to meet. Jacques arranged it. First he asked me whether I would like to meet the New Year with some comrades and then he said: 'You'd do better to have a rest,' and he explained that I could rest here with you.... Wasn't that a stroke of luck?... And it was good of the doctor

to let us leave the table.... Now, Marie, we can say in a proper way—a happy New Year! Wait, not like that.... Let me kiss you....”

They forgot everything. Suddenly, as if from a distance he heard Marie’s voice:

“Did you lock the door, Jeannot? I’m afraid—Bluebeard may come in....”

He laughed. And he kissed her again.

“I’ve never been so happy before!....”

“Marie, switch the light on.... It’s next to you.... I beg of you.... I want to look at you....”

He looked at her and smiled: how beautiful she was! You couldn’t see it in the daytime.... But just now she was very beautiful. Her eyes were so unusual—misty and yet bright....

They lay side by side under the bronze Cupid and talked in whispers about happiness. They dreamed of the future, like children who invent a happy ending for a frightful story.

“Everything will be all right,” whispered Pepe. “It will be all over with them this year, I feel certain. You can’t imagine what the Russians have done! ... Jacques told me that they have pushed forward two hundred kilometres, that’s as far as from here to Lille, do you understand? Stalin is in command over them, so of course they will beat the Boches.... And their generals are young. Ours were like that doctor.... Do you remember I told you about Vlachov, how he visited our factory? He understands absolutely everything. He must be a general now.... The Russians will drive the Boches out everywhere, there’s nothing surprising about it.... Won’t there be rejoicing, can you picture it?”

“Jeannot, do you believe we will be together?...”

“Absolutely! We’ll go to the seaside. You have never been to the seaside either, have you? Mama went to Brittany once. She said it was indescribable—water as far as the eye can see, and waves as big as a house.... Or we’ll go to Marseilles, the Marseillaises are such a jolly people.... We can travel to ten, to a hundred cities. Together, of course.... Summer—vacation, you don’t have to hurry in the morning, I will bring you coffee in bed, we can drink the coffee, close the shutters, and it will be night again, we can kiss.... I could kiss you for a whole year at a stretch, do you understand?...”

Suddenly Marie remembered Jacques saying: “They tortured him for four days.”... She kissed him, repressing her tears, kissed him as if she were saying farewell to every particle of him....

“Jeannot! ... My Jeannot! ...”

And again she forgot everything; she lay happy, smiling. And again he kissed her. She said, laughing:

“And you said we could sleep peacefully here....”

They woke up late. Dr. Vacher had gone out. The housekeeper brought them coffee. They said good-bye to her. Marie exclaimed:

"I've forgotten my comb..."

Pepe followed her, he guessed why she had gone back—they had to say good-bye to each other where nobody could see. She embraced him, could not tear herself away.

"Au revoir, Marie! We shall meet again soon..."

The streets were deserted; the Parisians who had celebrated the New Year were still asleep. Pepe went to a comrade and had a nap there. The revolver was to be brought at seven o'clock—it was dangerous to go about with that plaything....

Another two hours.... He turned the plan of operations over in his mind again: run to the coal yard, over the wall—and he is in rue Dauphine, there will be plenty of people there, easy to lose oneself.... He was not afraid; he thought of what was ahead as if it were a puzzle: he must solve it.

Just after seven o'clock he pushed the restaurant door open and felt pleased: the day had certainly been well chosen—only one table was engaged, at the back, near the telephone—a fat man with two ladies. An actor, no doubt, he had a comical face....

It was a small restaurant—eight tables, a zinc-covered bar. It was difficult to believe that a German could discover a place like this, why even the Parisian connoisseurs of cooking did not know Jean's. In a few months' time it will be fashionable, like le Chapon d'Or.... For the time being it was full on week days, but not crowded. Today it was quite deserted....

Scheller was not there, but this did not alarm Pepe, he knew that the German was to arrive at half past seven—"as regular as a clock."... The host, with a cigarette butt trembling on his hanging lip, looked at Pepe distrustfully with his small cunning eyes—who's that? Such a one will order food, eat, drink and then refuse to pay—"too dear."... Perhaps he thinks this is a common grub shop! He went up to Pepe, wondering how he could get him out of the place. But Pepe knew how to talk to tavernkeepers:

"I didn't meet the New Year very well—I was in a train.... I want to make up for it.... My brother-in-law told me: the only place to go to is Jean's. You know him, of course, Monsieur Duval of the Credit Lyonnais. Don't you remember him? Stocky, slightly grey hair.... He always orders chambertin...."

Although the host could not recall who this stocky man with slightly grey hair was he softened at once.

"I have only well-to-do customers.... What would you like?"

"I don't know.... What can you offer?..."

Pepe swallowed the bits of fat meat with difficulty, but pretended to eat with relish, smacked his lips as he sipped the wine and said to the host: "Chambertin is certainly worth its price."...

At last the sound of an automobile was heard. Pepe knew that

Scheller would dismiss the car until nine—like a clock.... Tall, thin, a scar on his left cheek—just as Jacques had said.... Scheller was with a French woman, she clung to his arm and kept repeating: "My little treasure!..." A pity he couldn't also remove that slut. But it can't be helped, we are not anarchists. Discipline, the orders are—only the Boche. But that slut deserves to be put out of the way. Doesn't take her eyes off him, the bitch!... Never mind, when we drive the Germans out she'll get what's coming to her.

Scheller hung up his greatcoat and sword belt. He sat in a convenient place—second table from the door.... Now he must wait until the restaurant keeper goes out. It was risky, of course, a new customer may come in. But the restaurant keeper is more dangerous—evidently he is closely connected with the Boches. The fat one is far away. And besides, such a one would not interfere, he would be frightened.... A pity I missed the moment when he went into the cellar for a bottle. But the Boche has almost mopped up his own and will soon order another....

Pepe did not miss, besides it was difficult to miss—he fired point-blank. As he ran down the narrow deserted street the woman's shriek was still ringing in his ears.

A few minutes later he was walking down rue Dauphine, unhurriedly, like a man who had come out for a stroll and a drink. Now he must get to the Boulevard Pasteur. Formigé lives there—it is the nearest place. He had made sure in the daytime that he could stay there until morning. Formigé had made a grimace, but consented. Pepe walked down the rue Vaugirard—it was a longer route, but he would avoid the Gare Montparnass, where raids often took place. His papers were not bad, of course. But with this plaything....

When he reached the house where Formigé lived he looked at his watch: half past nine.... Good that he was not too late; the concierge was a bitch.... But it was a safe place: that Formigé is lying very low....

The concierge looked like an old lap dog—a little woman, dirty-grey curls, pink inflamed eyes, and a squeaky voice.

"Monsieur Formigé is not at home."

He called out, already from the staircase:

"All right, I'll leave him a note...."

Before he knew where he was his arms were bound. The German felt the revolver in his pocket. He gave Pepe a swinging blow in the face. Somebody said: "Not here. Somebody may come."... They dragged Pepe down the stairs, bundled him into a car. He was brought round by the cold wind, he spat blood. How absurd—to get away and then get caught in a simple mousetrap! Still, he had removed Scheller, that was the main thing....

February, as always, was a capricious month, the warm spring days were followed by sleet. Nivelles was in a state of mental perturbation. It was not the news from the Eastern Front that disturbed him, he knew how strong the Germans were and laughed when London reported Russian successes. It was something else that disturbed Nivelles... He listened in to the London broadcast, everybody knew that he was an advocate of Franco-German rapprochement, an official at the Prefecture, in short, a man whose loyalty cannot be doubted; but it was enough for some bum to report—and he would be accused of “de Gaullism.” ... I understand, he said to himself, that it is necessary to safeguard the common people against Communist propaganda. But it is different with people like me, we cannot live on pap, we need some spice. I welcomed the Nazis because they had proclaimed the principle of an intellectual hierarchy. But now they are putting everybody on the same level. What do they care about ancient civilization? All they care about is drilling. A mixture of savagery and Americanism...

These gloomy reflections would be interspersed with fits of cheerfulness. It was enough to go to the Champs-Élysées on a fine day to see that Paris was reviving. Everything looked impoverished, it could not be denied, there were few automobiles. Bareheaded girls with handbags strung across their shoulders glided past on bicycles. They were elegant, like the Graces... There was a shortage of food, everything was rationed—Martha was having a hard time, but Magdalene was putting on weight. Nivelles's new book had been printed on excellent Holland paper and the *Aujourd'hui* had published a lengthy review of it. They never wrote about me like that when there were more opportunities to do so... Concerts, exhibitions, the ballet... The Germans are coarse, it would be ridiculous to deny it, but they show fine regard for our culture. A barbarian in an animal skin gazing at an Anjou rose afraid to crush its petals—what a subject for a new book...

Nivelles continued, as before, to go to the Prefecture every morning.

The Germans were hard taskmasters and kept him busy. At one moment they would catch a Jew who had evaded registration, at another, they would raid a place where documents were forged, then they would round up Poles who had been posing as natives of Picardy. Nivelles performed his duty conscientiously, but without enthusiasm. More than once, touched, or, perhaps, simply vexed by the tears of relatives, he shielded an arrested person. At night he purged himself of police affairs with poems.

He endeavoured to promote cultural rapprochement between the French and the Germans. It was decided to organize an exhibition of modern French painting in Berlin. Some artists agreed to send their pictures, others were evasive, said that they had none. Nivelles went to

see Sembat, although he disliked him; he was an original, talented artist, and personal likes and dislikes must be ignored.

Sembat growled gloomily:

"I won't send any."

"But why?..."

"I have seen enough of them.... A lot they understand about these things!..."

"We must cultivate their tastes."

"Pictures are no use.... Bombs would be more effective."

Nivelle took his leave coldly and went away. Like many others, Sembat refused to understand history. France had been a great power, that period had ended. But even the vanquished can have art. The Athenians, under the yoke of Rome, remained Athenians. The Germans have ruined us, that's beyond doubt. I cannot afford the things I could have before. But I can write poetry, here I am master.... They are not threatening my spiritual world, they are not Communists....

It was a fine warm evening. Nivelle breathed with relief: the winter was over. The last war winter.... The summer will see the end of the war. He walked along the dark embankment in deep meditation. He did not expect to meet anybody, and besides, how was it possible to recognize a man in this darkness.

"Good evening, Monsieur Nivelle!"

Sembat stood, his enormous arms extended on each side of him, mumbling something; it was at once evident that he was drunk. Nivelle wanted to go on, but Sembat barred his way:

"How are you? Have you collected any pictures? How about Persephone? Have you registered her at the Prefecture?..."

"You are drunk," said Nivelle indignantly. "I'm not accustomed to talking to drunks."

"Yes, drunk," confessed Sembat. "Got fed up with the Siegfrieds so I went and got drunk.... You are not accustomed to talk to drunks? There's lots of things I can't get accustomed to.... Can't get accustomed to the Siegfrieds, to you, to anything...."

Nivelle strode rapidly along the deserted embankment. Sembat overtook him and, his breath reeking of alcohol, shouted:

"When they hang you Persephone will not bat an eyelid, you can take my word for it!"

Nivelle could not recover his composure for a long time. It was not worth while paying attention to the sallies of a drunkard, of course.... But Sembat had said what they were thinking. Some had fled abroad to avoid sharing the hard lot of their people. Others were stranded here, said nothing, waited for the hour. They were dreaming of one thing: revenge.... I want to save French civilization, but those scoundrels say I have been "bought." I am too much of a gentleman to be vindictive. It would be enough for me to say one word and Sembat

would no longer be roaming about Paris. But I say nothing, and won't say anything—I want to save this splendid colourist for France. They envy my success. How mean!... The Germans, of course, do not understand my poems, Schirke says he appreciates them, but I don't believe him, and yet the Germans protect me....

Last autumn the editor of *l'Œuvre* had asked Nivelles several times to write an article about the war in the East. Nivelles had refused, pleading that he was a poet, only a poet. The editor was therefore pleasantly surprised when Nivelles telephoned him: "I will write for your newspaper, I feel it my duty to remind people about European solidarity."

Nivelles's article entitled "The Last Combat" differed from the other articles published in *l'Œuvre* only in its excessively florid style and abundant references to mythology which almost drove the old proofreader out of his mind: "Who is guarding the groves of civilization—from the Eleusinian cypresses to the Hyperborean pines under which Knut Hamsun writes his books? When reading the newspapers, across the columns of which flash the harsh names 'Sukhinichi,' 'Velikiye Luki', I think of the last combat between Antaeus and Hercules. Antaeus was the giant son of Gaea-Earth; to be able to emerge the victor he clung to the earth; herein lies the pathos of materialism. The demigod Hercules, vanquisher of Hydra, tore Antaeus from the ground and throttled him. How can we fail to recognize in the humble native of old Weimar, or in the gay son of Venice, or in the stern lumberjack of Suomi who now, amidst the snows of Scythia, is protecting us from the monster of Communism, the fearless Hercules?..." Few, of course, read this article to the end; and Nivelles, after placing the newspaper clipping of it in his album for new verses had no intention of returning to journalism. But two weeks later he received a letter—written in a small, neat hand on good paper, anonymous, of course: "Nivelles! Your name has been entered in the list of traitors. Prepare for a shameful death. Long live fighting France! A bullet for the traitor!"

He could not fall asleep that night. He felt like a soldier on the eve of battle. He looked at his album in surprise and thrust it into his table drawer—not in the mood for poetry now! They were stronger than he had thought, and more insolent. The fight was going on not only in distant Russia—but here, and he—was in the front line....

Next morning his fellow employees at the Prefecture saw that he looked tired and haggard and inquired about his health. He talked little, but worked with greater zeal than he had done before. In the evening he roamed the streets, every now and again feeling for his revolver. He wanted to shout: Come on, you cowards, shoot!...

Gradually, he calmed down, but he could not return to his poetry, he made the following entry in his diary: "I have become a

different man, the epoch of pure art has ended. Blood is needed, perhaps my blood, perhaps only theirs." ...

Three weeks later he was handed a visiting card: "Yvonne de Portail." He became lost in thought: his childhood emerged from the mist. Nivelles was the son of a notary, he grew up in a small town in the province of Anjou. Over the humble abodes of the local shopkeepers and artisans, over the hotel and the Mairie, towered a large eighteenth-century mansion set in a park with arbours and hothouses. When Nivelles used to pass through the gates it seemed to him that he was entering Paradise. Widow Yvonne de Portail, the owner of the mansion, had regarded the notary not only as her lawyer but also as her friend. The notary's son became the playmate of the son of the lady of the manor. God, how long ago that was! ... And she was still alive. ... He remembered that Madame de Portail was waiting for him and he stepped into the reception room. He kissed her hand with emotion—his parents had died long ago, and this was the first time in many years that he was meeting somebody who connected him with his remote childhood:

"Do you remember me?..."

Before him sat a very old lady, dry, like a flower between the pages of a book—looking at her he vaguely recalled her former beauty.

"I would never have dared to come to you, but look what a time we are living in. ... And besides, I know you remember old friends. At one time you grew up together with poor Roger. ..."

"Is Roger?..."

"He died a prisoner of war last autumn. I received his last letter in July. And then came the notification. ... I must initiate you into our family affairs, don't be surprised, Léon's fate depends upon it. And all I live for now is Léon. ... Roger would never obey me. He was of feeble health, I wanted him to take up law or literature, but he became an army officer. He met a woman. ... Don't think that this is maternal jealousy, I felt at once that they were not made for each other. She deserted him, leaving a year-old child. We kept this a secret. ... I brought up Léon. Here is his photograph. He looks like his father, doesn't he? I gave him more than I ever gave my son—my youth had passed, nothing else interested me. He is a splendid boy, his tutors said he has great capabilities. He writes poetry. Like you. ... It was this that encouraged me to come and see you. I've even brought one of his poems, still childish, of course—he will be eighteen within a month. ... And so. ..."

She sobbed; there were no tears, low plaintive sounds like the peep of a small bird burst from her throat.

"Pardon me. ... I will tell you everything now. ... On the third of March the police came. Frenchmen, there were no Germans, they

were looking for somebody named Tinnet. He was a Communist, I think, they had made a mistake, he was hiding on the floor above and escaped, so they said, I don't know whether it is true, the concierge had not seen anything. In my apartment they found a notebook with Léon's poems. He is only a boy, in one poem he wrote something that was silly, he had filled his mind with Hugo.... I give you my word that he is remote from politics. It was a momentary mood.... They took Léon away...."

Nivelle smiled:

"What could he have written? They don't arrest people for poems. Have you that poem with you?"

"No, they took it away. He wrote that France would be resurrected, in the style of Hugo. There are some childish lines about him wanting to shoot traitors. He has never held a gun in his hand.... He wrote that the Germans were.... I don't remember the word, 'brutes' I think.... That's what frightens me so. He was not arrested by Germans, but suppose the Gestapo gets those poems?... You—are a Frenchman, you understand me...."

And again the soft plaintive sounds were heard. Nivelle poured some water into a glass from the carafe.

"I will try to clear the matter up.... Don't worry. And besides, the Germans are not brutes, they don't make war on children...."

When Madame de Portail went away Nivelle was at a loss what to do. The first thing that entered his head was—to put in a request that he be released. I will say—he is a budding poet, that I know the family well.... Perhaps he will be famous, the poems are naive but there is melody in them.... Then he recalled the anonymous letter. "A bullet for the traitor."... That's just the kind that shoot! Mere boys.... Who is behind him is obvious. A good thing they got him before he shot somebody. Better for him....

Two days passed. An official entered Nivelle's room and after receiving the information he required he said:

"I went to visit my sister in Soissons. The bandits there have cast off all restraint. Recently they killed Barreau. A businessman, the most honest of men. He had helped the police to get onto the tracks of a terrorist. They shot him in his shop and left a note: 'Death to the traitors.' A strong hand is needed...."

Nivelle could not conceal his emotion, and the official, pleased with the effect his information had produced, added:

"Unfortunately, this is becoming an everyday affair, people are ceasing to notice it...."

Colonel von Hallenberg telephoned:

"An arrested person. Léon de Portail, or rather his grandmother, refers us to you...."

"I know Madame de Portail. As regards the grandson.... He is

a mere boy, he has not yet managed to do anything, but of course, it is not precluded that he is connected with terrorists. . . .”

The Colonel was touched: the Prefecture was regarded as a hot-bed of Free Masons; Nivelles was said to be playing a double game, shielding de Gaullists.

“I very much appreciate your frankness. We have common ideals. . . . You are a brave man and a real Frenchman.”

“Monsieur le Colonel. . . .” Nivelles’s voice trembled. “Please bear in mind that he has not done anything, and also his age—he is only a boy. . . .”

The Colonel laughed; the laughter gurgled in the receiver like water flowing from a faucet.

“Don’t worry. Monsieur Nivelles, we are not brutes. And thank you again.”

* 25 *

It was hard to believe that Galochka had been called the laughing girl—she had not laughed for a long time. When she woke up it seemed to her that—all this was a dream, that she only had to rub her eyes—and it would pass away. . . . But no, it was true, the Germans were in Kiev, had been here for over five months already. . . .

She had wanted to go away. Rudenko had said: “What—are you panicky? . . .” He went away, but Galochka had remained. Where were all her friends from the Pickwick Club? Raya was in the army, Boris was missing, Valya was probably in Moscow. Lucky girl! . . . As for Zina, Galochka had lost sight of her even before the war. Vera Platonovna was killed, Raya’s Mama was killed. Several times Galochka went to see Steshenko. Alexei Nikolayevich had changed very much, had become dry, unfriendly. Antonina Petrovna sighed, frequently dried her eyes. The last time Galochka had been there Alexei Nikolayevich had said: “Why don’t you go to the City Administration? We ought to work, that’s what I say! . . .” Galochka had enquired in astonishment: “What will you do under the Germans? . . .” He shouted: “I will teach—how to respect order. We’ve had enough of walking on our heads! The Germans are—Varangians. . . .” Antonina Petrovna burst into tears. Galochka went away.

She had only one friend left now—Uncle Lyonya, her dead mother’s brother. He had worked at the Arsenal—when the Germans were approaching he was down with suppurating pleurisy and could not get away, and so he was left stranded in Kiev. Now he was making cigarette lighters and selling them in the market place. Galochka sewed, darned and washed clothes. They often met of an evening: although Uncle Lyonya was fifty-six, they understood each other perfectly.

Kreshchatik no longer existed—it was a heap of ruins. The city was deserted, some were in the army, others had evacuated. And how many had the Germans killed? They say, seventy thousand in Bahby Yar alone.... Sometimes you walk down Shevchenko Boulevard and for a moment it seems that this is—Kiev, familiar houses, trees clothed in light, soft mantles of snow, in the distance a little dog is barking, a railway engine hoots.... But Kiev does not exist. When a bird falls dead a new, posthumous life commences around it—worms wriggle, shiny bluebottles buzz. Mysterious people came creeping out of the nooks and crannies of Kiev. They had lived in the city before, but nobody had noticed them. One had been a house manager, another had served in the State Bank, a third had been a clerk, a fourth a warehouseman, a fifth a cutter at a tailor shop in Lvov Street, a sixth had been a stagehand, a seventh had worked at the People's Commissariat for Public Health.... Now they were wriggling, buzzing. They ransacked the apartments of responsible workers and took away the sticks of furniture that the Germans had left; sold, rebought, resold, quarrelled over Vera Platonovna's chest of drawers, did not even disdain to take Alya's little coat. They played chemin de fer with greasy packs of cards, shouted hoarsely: "I take the bank," quarrelled: "That nine you have is marked...." They traded in the market place with machine parts, Hungarian cognac, the jackets of men who had been hanged, German needles; they exchanged cigarettes for Moscow soap, chocolate for backfat, backfat for schnapps. They drank vodka, rum, home brew, blasphemed and swore. They were not numerous, but they were conspicuous—other people lay low, but they fussed around, pushed themselves forward. The former house manager is now—somebody in the City Administration; the warehouseman had opened a secondhand store and sold chandeliers, ice cream freezers and the underwear of former active citizens; the former clerk at the State Bank is now a journalist and writes for the local rag, glorifying the Führer; the former employee of the People's Commissariat for Public Health sold to the Italians sulfadin stolen from the Germans, vowing: "I will cure you in three hours"; the former stagehand hunts for Jews, and after receiving his reward from the Germans sings "Marfusha Wants to Get Married": the tailor's cutter shouts in his backyard that he is now a "Volksdeutsche" and shows to doubters a stamped certificate.

"Skimmed milk," sighed Uncle Lvonya. "The young people have gone into the army, the factories have been evacuated. Who has remained? Women with children, invalids, or those who got left behind by accident, like you and me. We are few.... That's why those bums have become so cocky...."

There were many soldiers in Kiev—Germans, Rumanians, Hungarians, Italians. They halted here on the way to the front. They tried to

keep their spirits up and superstitiously wore amulets on their chests, boasted that they would soon occupy the whole of Russia and then go on to India, and shuddered when a rifle shot rang out. The Germans snapped their cameras, took each other's photographs against the background of ruins. The Rumanians tried to sell or buy things. The Italians sang, spat and tried to sneak trifles from stalls. Uncle Lyonya said: "After all, they have retained some sense of decency, the German openly grabs, but he waits until you turn away, that shows he's ashamed. . . ." Wounded were brought in from the East, they no longer thought about India; they remembered the cold, the "Katyushas," death. Sometimes the Germans convoyed Red Army prisoners; the women gazed at them sadly and tried surreptitiously to hand them a roll, an egg, a piece of backfat. But the Germans yelled: "Faster" and beat the prisoners with the butts of their rifles.

Everywhere one saw notices "For Germans Only." Galochka once said to Uncle Lyonya: "We shall wake up one day and see a sign in the sky 'For Germans Only.'" German theatres, cinemas, clubs, restaurants. The Germans tried to lure the girls to dances. The girls hid themselves, dressed in rags, some smeared their faces with soot, and Galochka's neighbour shaved her head. Who, then, were gadding about with the Germans? Only a few, but they too were conspicuous. One flaunted an enormous imitation leather handbag, another emptied a whole bottle of perfume upon herself, a third related how she was taken for a ride and then made drunk with champagne. Nina, formerly a cashier at a department store, said to Uncle Lyonya: "They are not like our boys, they are refined, they kiss your hand. . . ." People gave these the cold shoulder, called them "German bedding," "German sheep dogs." Galochka heard a blind man singing mournfully on the church steps:

*Like German dolls they've curled their locks,
With painted faces they spin like tops.
But scorn and contempt will be their lot
When our boys come marching home. . . .*

Later it was said that the Germans took the blind man away.

Shots rang out frequently, they fired to frighten the people, fired when they were drunk, and fired when they were frightened themselves. People said that Germans were shot at night, now in Lipky, now in Slobodka, at another time in Korolenko Street. I wish I knew who was shooting, thought Galochka. Perhaps some of our people have remained in the city? . . .

The winter was a long one. Galochka grew sadder and sadder. Uncle Lyonya could not comfort her, he himself would say: "It's hard to die—there's so little hope." . . . But one day Galochka found a note under her door. Unfolding it, she cried out in amazement and looked at

the ceiling as if the note had dropped from the skies. She read and reread it again and again.

"Citizens of Kiev!

"Don't believe the lying reports of the Germans. The German hordes have been routed near Moscow. Hitler is now obliged to transfer all his forces to the East. The time is not distant when the Americans and the English will land in Europe. German cities have learned what air raids are. A people's war is raging in all the occupied countries. Day after day Soviet partisans in the Ukraine and in Byelorussia are striking in the enemy's rear. The Germans have not taken Moscow. The Germans have not taken Leningrad. The hour is drawing near when the Red Army will liberate our beautiful Kiev. Don't work for the Germans! Don't believe the Germans! Be real Soviet citizens! If you possess weapons, kill the Germans! If you have no weapons, get them and kill the Germans! Remember the words of the poet: 'The Ukraine will never, never be the slave of the German butchers!' Pass this leaflet on to your comrades! Long live our Soviet Motherland! Long live our Stalin, our Party, our people!

Kiev Young Communist Leaguers."

Galochka could not restrain herself, she ran to Uncle Lyonya began to read the leaflet to him and burst into tears from agitation. Then she remembered:

"How silly I was—I thought it had been dropped from an aeroplane. But I found it under the door..."

She burst out laughing—for the first time, merrily, as befitted the "laughing girl."

Uncle Lyonya gazed long at the faint, blurred letters.

"This was printed here.... They're a brave lot! Your comrades, Galochka.... I'm not afraid to die now...."

"If only I could find them!..."

Uncle Lyonya was a kindhearted man, but of weak character, he lacked will: this explains why he had not become an engineer, why he had not married, why he had never in his life done anything in his own way, had never argued, and when anybody offended him he would blink his dull, myopic eyes and make no retort.

It was a fine day in March. The sun was already shedding warmth. Uncle Lyonya was sitting in the market place with his cigarette lighters and thinking: after all, it's good that spring has come, your heart feels lighter somehow.... A young German came up. Uncle Lyonya at once felt that he was dangerous, but it was too late to get away. The German

picked up a cigarette lighter, turned it over and over, threw it to the ground and said in broken Russian:

"Bad! . . . All Russia bad! . . ."

Uncle Lyonya blinked, but said nothing. The German kicked his fur hat off his head and chuckled:

"You dog! . . . All Russia dog! . . ."

It is difficult to explain what took place in Uncle Lyonya's heart: he was by no means a hero, he made cigarette lighters, only five minutes before he had rejoiced at the coming of the spring. But something burst inside him, he answered the German in the words that had sunk into his mind:

"You have not taken Moscow? You have not taken Leningrad? You'll have to clear out of here soon! . . ."

The German blew a whistle, other Germans came up; they dragged Uncle Lyonya away.

When Lieutenant Bach reported the incident in the market place to Major von Echtberger the latter said: "Give him a good shaking up." . . . They beat Uncle Lyonya in the face, on his heels, on his groins; then they hung him up by the legs.

"Herr Major, he has not divulged anything, and in my opinion he doesn't know anything. He gave me the impression of being a dull, downtrodden creature. Moreover, Corporal Forst, who took him into custody, was intoxicated at the time. . . ."

The Major lit a cigar, screwing up his eyes.

"Ask Lieutenant Streibel and Captain Gross to come in. I'm tired of delivering lectures on every single incident, I want to expound a few general principles."

When all three were present, the Major began:

"The trouble is that you have been in France and fail to understand how different the situation is here, even you, Lieutenant Streibel, although you have been here from the very beginning. In France our duty was to use methods of persuasion, we were held in rein by Berlin, the Army was opposed to stern measures. So much fuss was made over a single Frenchman that it was enough to make you ill. But here nobody puts any restraint upon us, do you understand me?—nobody. Colonel Schramm has spoken to the Oberpräsident; Herr Koch said he would not interfere in this. . . . These are not Frenchmen, here even the children bite. It is ridiculous to talk about legal standards in a country which has been ruled by the Bolsheviks. I don't mean that we ought to kill indiscriminately. That would be silly, and ignoble, I would say—not German. . . . We need an apartment, as the Oberpräsident expressed it, and an apartment with servants. . . . I sent Lieutenant Krämer to a combat unit because he took it into his head to shoot through a window only because he had supped well. We must not kill wholesale, but we must not, as in France, stand on ceremony. We must intim-

idate them, and to achieve this we must exterminate a certain part of them. . . . If a man is not guilty of anything and there is no suspicion against him, let him go on with his work. I hope you have understood me."

For all that Lieutenant Bach dared to ask:

"What shall we do with that one, Herr Major? . . ."

The question seemed so silly to the Major that he burst out laughing, choked with cigar smoke, coughed, wiped his face with a handkerchief and began to laugh again.

"Recently the English wrote that the Gestapo is—'a vipers' nest.' What sort of a viper are you? You are a lamb. What you should do with him? I'll explain right now. . . . Take him and . . . piff-puff, piff-puff! Out of him will grow a tiny violet, and you will pluck it and present it to Fräulein Irma. . . ."

He laughed so much that later Captain Gross said to Bach: "The Major must have received a decoration. I haven't seen him in such a merry mood for a long time. . . ."

It was only a week later that Galochka learned that Uncle Lyonya had been killed. And so I am alone. . . . Where is Boris, Zina? And what shall I do in this alien city? Here I was born, grew up, and now not a soul. . . . She peered keenly into the faces of passers-by—perhaps it is one of my comrades? . . . And at night she carefully copied on the backs of old invoices which she had picked up, this same leaflet: "Citizens of Kiev. . . ." When she slipped one of these copies under somebody's door she felt better, as if she were saying to an unknown friend, comforting him: this will end soon! . . .

* 26 *

Although dressmaker Kulik lived in a semi-cellar dwelling, she enjoyed a good reputation among the numerous ladies of the "new order." The wives of the members of the City Administration said: "That wretched little dressmaker has foreign chic." . . . Her room was clean and tidy: the walls were hung with illustrations from German magazines and a coloured portrait of Hitler. Looking at it Misha would fume: "What a mug! . . ." Misha would come running in, always gasping for breath: "The communiqué says 'nothing of importance.' And Stepan wrote this—how they are looting the Ukraine. Will there be enough paper? . . ."

At one time Zina had been angry with her mother for compelling her to learn to sew: what do I want it for? I hate finery. . . . Now it came in useful. At night they dragged the District Committee's cyclostyle (Misha had managed to take it away) and an old typewriter from under the bed. Zina had awful trouble with the typewriter—the letter "r" wouldn't work. . . .

Often she left the house carrying a parcel. The Germans looked at her in surprise—where did such a one come from?... Her dark features made her look like an Italian; there are girls like that in the Ukraine, slender nose, scarlet lips, flashing eyes, black like the southern night. Sometimes Germans would accost her, try to entice her to their quarters. She would answer in German: "I'm going to one of your officers."...

She carried leaflets to Shura in Demiyevka. Sometimes she found Stepan waiting for her there.

"Listen," he said one day. "You can now sign them 'City Party Committee,' we have established connection.... It's all quiet at the fronts. What mood do you think they are in?"

"Whom do I see? Not even traitors—wives, talk about clothes. The front is far from here, they have nothing to worry about.... The wives of some of the Germans have come. The interpreter said to me: 'You will have new customers soon, they have clothes, of course, but a lady always needs some alteration or freshening up for a dress; you have taste and you speak German.'... Give me other work, Stepan. I can shoot somebody. Don't you believe me?"

He laughed.

"Why shouldn't I believe you? I do believe you. Only everybody has his job. That's what we've got an organization for. Have a smoke...."

"Why, you know I don't smoke."

"But smoke these—they come from over there. 'Kazbek.'... Yesterday a civilian was popped off in Lvov Street—a sugar-beet specialist. We didn't do it.... That shows that some of our boys must have remained in the city. Only it's hard to get on their tracks.... We were lucky to find you.... Tell me, Zina, I've been wanting to ask you a long time, when you were in trouble in nineteen thirty-nine, why didn't you give a full explanation?... You didn't behave right, not comradesly. I've been watching you closely lately and I think you are the genuine stuff, as they say.... And yet you behaved like a fool then...."

Zina became lost in thought, she seemed to be staring not at the greasy wallpaper, but at something far away, through the wall, into her past.

"Yes, I agree, I did not behave well. But try and understand me, I spoke sincerely at that meeting, but they wouldn't believe me. I know my weakness, it was the same when I was a child, my mother used to scold me for it, and in school they teased me and said I was 'proud.'... I thought—I'll go—and they would say 'she's scared, she is drawing back,' or that I was unprincipled and was seeking a soft job.... I didn't know you well then, I saw you at meetings, that's all. Now I know you are a good comrade, but then you were just the Secretary.... When the Germans were approaching I got as far as Brovary, but it

was already occupied. I had no weapons. I comforted myself with the thought—I'll get back to Kiev and think up something, kill at least one of them. And suddenly—this was in October—I saw Misha. How glad I was—one of our own!... Listen, Stepan, it will soon be six months that you have been fighting, but I must keep pounding a typewriter and, in addition, talk to those bitches.... Give me a different assignment. . . ."

"Wait. . . ."

When Zina had gone he thought to himself: a good girl! Sometimes we did not pay sufficient attention to people.... Now we are going through a real test. Kravchenko.... He was regarded as most reliable, but he deserted.... They said that Ivanchuk was a "coward," later they said he was a "self-seeker." Why? Because he had asked for a room.... But Ivanchuk blew up a troop train, turned out to be a hero, will get a posthumous decoration.... It was hard to get to know people then—we lived peacefully, worked, studied, one fellow complained that his mother didn't have a room, another got married, everyday life.... Things were clear, and yet foggy. Now, we are right in the thick of a fog—and yet things are clear....

Several more weeks passed. The cyclostyle, leaflets, those disgusting ladies, the lascivious smiles of Germans. Somewhere a frightful war is raging. Partisans lay mines, blow up trains. And how many attacks on Germans there have been in this very city.... But she must sit and wait. It was she who had thought up this sewing business. Stepan had said at the time: "camouflage... militant work...." To sit like in an office!...

Stepan met her with a smile:

"Do you know Boris?"

"Which one?"

"He says he was at school with you...."

Zina burst out laughing:

"Of course I know him. Is he really in Kiev?"

"He's with the partisans. He managed to get through with a message.... That Boris asked about you and said 'If she's in Kiev, she's with us.' ... Well, he conveys his sentiments, but that's uninteresting third hand, you can guess for yourself."

That night, after finishing her work. Zina sat on her bed for a long time smiling vaguely. She recalled the night when Boris came to her, read his verses, and how they used to meet later on and talk—long, ardently. She could not remember what they had talked about, but every word seemed important then.... She already knew that this was happiness.... Only there was no happiness. Somehow they did not give utterance to what was the most essential. He went to Western Ukraine.... He is alive, fighting with the partisans, that's splendid!... And he guessed that I am in the ranks, he had no doubts.... That shows there

is happiness! . . . For an hour Zina forgot about the Germans, about the war, lived for Borya, dreamed of meeting him: we'll say what we left unsaid, we'll understand each other, we shall not part again. . . .

Next morning the interpreter came:

"I have brought you pleasant news, Maria Ilyinichna—Frau von Echtberger wants to see you. She is such a kind lady, so generous! She gave me a bottle of Chanel perfume and two pairs of stockings. What dresses she has—all from Paris! A real fashion plate! She has put on a little weight and her dresses need letting out—you will see for yourself. You can thank me, it was I who recommended you."

She managed to meet Stepan only two days later. He listened to what she had to say, but said nothing. Zina's heart throbbed: everything will be decided in a moment. . . . At last Stepan said:

"This is a serious matter. . . . I must talk to the comrades about it. In the meantime go on with your work and study the situation. . . ." He smiled. "Take care you don't spoil her dresses. I myself haven't much confidence in your dressmaking abilities. . . ."

Frau von Echtberger was agitated: her husband had warned her many times that nobody could be relied upon in this country, they could not even wash a shirt. . . . Zina made a favourable impression upon her. But still she was afraid to trust her with her Parisian *crêpe-georgette* dress.

"I warn you that if you spoil it. . . ."

She did not deem it necessary to finish the sentence.

Next day Stepan said:

"The comrades have approved. Listen, Zina, every detail must be thought out. . . . How will you get away? . . ."

Zina altered the dress in the Adjutant's room. Next to it was the kitchen where two girls were busy and a fat German orderly was purring on a stool. There was a smell of fried onions. The Adjutant's room was bright and bare: bottles of pomade, cartridges, an album with views of Paris. On the wall—a large map with German flags stuck in it, one was sticking right next to Leningrad, another slightly to the left of Moscow. Zina sighed: it's frightful to think how far they have got! And everywhere our men must stand fast. . . . Even there, right at the top—near Murmansk. . . . They are standing fast. They have driven them away from Moscow. He hasn't shifted the flag. . . . The orderly began to sing: "You pierced my heart with an arrow." . . . Stepan had told her: "They stuck pins under Dima's fingernails." . . . They say that this von Echtberger—is a sadist, likes to torture people himself. . . . Looking at him you would not think it of him—an ordinary German, fat, genial, if anything. . . . I must get on with my work. I haven't done half of it yet. . . . When Mama sewed she used to say: "Sewn by my nieces, all falls to pieces." . . . When her mother was dying she wanted to say something but could not. Zina thought to herself: how horrible, she is

saying what is the most important, but I don't understand.... After that her mother lay on the bed, tiny, like a doll. Zina was frightened. Her old aunt came and for some reason she covered up the mirror. "You mustn't have them uncovered when there's a dead person in the house." ... This had frightened her still more. A strange thing—death, people talk, write and think about it, but still it is an enigma.... Zina recalled how she had worked on her treatise: "Overcoming Death."... Then everything seemed to be more complicated and yet more simple. Now death lurked beside her, perhaps in that kitchen (if only he would stop singing!), or behind the corner—in the steep street. Afraid? I think not. But perhaps I am afraid. I feel ill—as if I were seasick. She had once travelled from Odessa to Yalta, and she had had the same feeling of nausea.... Borya had written well about the sea, a pity she had not copied it, she didn't remember. Just now she wanted to repeat those lines.... Borya will understand.... Who knows, perhaps everything will pass off well.... She will tell him how she was doing her sewing. And thinking of him. Yes, yes, I am thinking of Borya.... I will repeat the name: Borya.... Borya....

Frau von Echtberger's bedroom was next to the room where the Major slept. She tried the dress on in the bedroom. Zina had forgotten the belt and she ran into the Adjutant's room to get it.

"Where did you get to? ... You must get this done, my husband will be home soon.... God, look—the V is out of place now! I told you not to do it like that...."

The V was in place, and after twisting and turning in front of the pier glass for several minutes Frau von Echtberger calmed down.

"You may go.... Walter will be here soon.... You will do the coat and skirt tomorrow. Wait, I'll tell the orderly to give you something to eat."

"No, thank you, I don't feel well. I'm afraid I'm going to have a fit, I had better hurry home...."

After Zina had gone Frau von Echtberger stood in front of the mirror for a long time. On the whole, I think it suits me to have put on weight, it's my style. I think a woman is ugly when she's thin. That Russian girl has quite a nice face, but she's half dead, and gets fits of some kind or other.... Men don't like that. The dress has turned out not so bad. They make them so well in Paris that even these miserable little dressmakers cannot spoil them. A pity I have no one to show off to. The Colonel doesn't give either receptions or dances. He is just a soldier.... The only occasion will be—the Führer's birthday—Walter has promised to invite officers. But it's a whole month to April the twentieth.... I'll make Walter invite Captain Gross and at supper I'll wear this dress. The Captain is very nice. He looks at me in such a way that I feel I want to shake my finger at him. For a woman of forty a naughty boy like that is a—windfall....

Zina wore a long sheepskin coat and peasant kerchief and carried a basket of eggs. To the German who scrutinized her papers at the exit from the city she complained: "They say they're dear, but hens don't lay at this season, do they?..." The German answered: "No understand," and Zina proceeded on her way.

There was still lots of snow about, but it was grey, porous, doomed. Slush underfoot. The air was raw and restless, it made one's head swim. Zina thought of nothing, forced herself to walk at an even pace, but she wanted to run. Her knees trembled. Am I really going to get a fit of some kind? ... She smiled, walked on with a faint, nebulous smile.

Suddenly a horrible thought flashed through her mind: suppose it has failed?... Stepan said that it had been tested.... But somebody may have found it. She had put it into a vase, nobody would look there.... That witch may want to put some flowers in.... Nonsense, there are no flowers now.... Somebody may have noticed that she had gone into the room twice.... No, if they had they would have caught her.... Even "tested" ones might not explode....

Again she stopped thinking; she could barely drag her feet along. When it seemed to her that she was about to drop she remembered: I'm going to Borya.... And she smiled again.

The sun was setting when Zina heard the sounds of an automobile behind her and she stepped aside, but the automobile stopped. Zina took the greasy permit from the basket, but the Germans wouldn't look at it, they bundled her into the car. In it were two girls, they were crying, saying that they were innocent. The car sped on further; after travelling another ten or fifteen kilometres it stopped at a guard post. The officer said: "Telephone and say that we are returning. If it is necessary to continue the search, let them send somebody out from Vasilkovo...."

Zina felt relieved: so it did explode.... But he might not have slept at home.... Now they'll torture me.... Won't I be able to hold out? ... I must keep saying something all the time—verses or "Borya." ... And suddenly she fell asleep, it was as sudden as a swoon. She was roused by a soldier: "Go on!"

There were thirty or forty young women. One of them was shrieking: she was in her last month and the birthpangs were commencing. A soldier brutally punched her in the back: "Shut up!" the officer enquired—"how many?" The answer was "thirty-eight."

Frau von Echtberger entered the long room in which they were herded. On catching sight of her face, swollen with tears, Zina almost cried out. It has worked! ... Frau von Echtberger said in a tearful voice: "Lord, why are you torturing me?... These are just common wenches.... You don't understand anything.... I will go to the Colonel...." She was about to leave when she caught sight of Zina.

"You had better name your accomplices," said Captain Gross. He

tried not to look at Zina. Eight years ago he had met a girl in Meran. . . . This terrorist has the same eyes. . . .

Zina kept silent: only her lips moved, perhaps she was repeating the name "Borya." . . .

"Who sent you?"

She became conscious of a feeling of extraordinary elation; she felt as though she was rising, high above this table, this city; her head swam; the words came of their own accord.

"Who sent me? Everybody. . . . Absolutely everybody. . . ."

"Stop declaiming, you're not on the stage! You'll be hanged, do you understand?"

He looked at her and shouted:

"And you need not look at me like that, you are not a mesmerist, it won't work! Answer! The names of your accomplices?"

"I have told you, I can't name them all. I am still young: there are so many of them. . . . Have you heard of Stalin? Stalin sent me. . . . I know you were routed near Moscow. I heard it over the radio. . . . General Rokossovsky, General Govorov, and other generals, I don't remember all their names, were there. . . . They, too, sent me. . . . You have hanged Gorenko and Dima Schwarz. They did not know that I would kill him. You hanged them before I did so. . . . But they sent me, that's true. . . ."

"Do you belong to the same group that Schwarz and Gorenko belonged to?"

"Yes, to the same group."

"Who else is in this group?"

"I have told you—everybody. Borya. . . ."

"His real name? Address? Present whereabouts?"

"In the forest. Killing the likes of you. He belongs to the same group, I'm speaking the truth. . . . There are very many of us—the people. . . ."

Gross yelled:

"Karl, take her away! We must talk to her differently. This creature is pretending to be mad. . . ."

There was one frightful moment when Zina felt that she could not remain silent any longer. They were scorching her breast. . . . She shrieked: "My! . . . My! . . . " No more words came, only shrieks.

She was lying on the slimy floor, her face was covered with blood. They dashed water over her. Gross said: "Give her a manicure." . . .

Now she remained silent.

Later Captain Gross bawled at Karl: "I'll order you to the penal battalion." . . . Karl knew that he was guilty; but at that moment he had lost all self-control—after all this, that girl dared to smile! He had taken her convulsions for a smile and had struck her on the head with a rifle butt.

"The Colonel will have the lot of us court-martialled. Not to get any information out of her! . . . And then, what kind of a punishment was it? She didn't have time to feel anything. . . ."

They were afraid of the Colonel, and Captain Gross concealed from him the fact that the criminal had died under interrogation. He reported:

"We were unable to get anything out of her except general phrases. She is now rolling about in a fit of epilepsy. . . ."

"She must be hanged," said the Colonel. "It's not only a matter of punishment, the educational effect of such measures is important. . . ."

Gross ordered the dead girl to be dressed. Karl washed the blood from her face. Zina's mouth was contorted, her lip was bitten through. Now Captain Gross, too, thought that she was smiling.

"This is scandalous! Straighten her mouth. . . ."

Zina was dragged to the gallows, supported under the armpits as if she were alive; once again her feet touched the dear earth.

Captain Gross wrote to his brother in Brussels: "You have not even a remote idea of how we are living here. We have to deal with monsters. The terrorist who killed the Major was smiling even with the noose around her neck. An accursed country!"

* 27 *

March was cold, with frequent blizzards; much snow had accumulated. It seemed as though the town was sleeping the sleep of the dead, covered with a quilt. But old women were cleaning up their houses in preparation for Easter. Now and again somebody would sigh: spring will be here soon. . . . People thought of spring with hope and with anxiety. Wounded men said: "It's sure to start in the spring." . . . Who will start—we or the Germans, neither the inhabitants of this small town nor those who had come from the front could tell.

The radio announced that fighting was going on and that both the enemy and we were sustaining heavy casualties. At the word "casualties" the heart shrank. Postmen with their precious burdens walked down the slippery, icy streets, through the soft snow in the courtyards and gardens. People waited for them at the garden gates, ran out to meet them. Sometimes old Fedotov would hand out a tiny paper triangle, and it seemed as though amidst the blizzard the world became serene, calm; more often Fedotov would mumble: "He will write. Have patience. . . ."

"Have patience."—People said that in a whisper, they wrote it in ardent, disjointed letters, they lived with it. In the autumn it had seemed to many that it could not continue like this, that it would end as suddenly as it had commenced. . . . Now everybody realized that it was going to be a long war, that one would have to live with it—with the black

disc that belched frightful words, with loneliness, with constant anxiety—suppose the letter is returned—"left the unit."...

There were many evacuees in the town; they introduced the feverishness of a railway junction into everyday life. Those from Leningrad were delirious about the Nevsky Prospect, uttered an unintelligible ominous word "dystrophia"... Those from Kiev walked about like somnambulists; they saw visions of steep streets along which Germans were marching.

One day Dr. Sabaneyev said to Natasha: "It is like an X-ray, it is possible to see now what a man has inside him—a heart or a rattle"... Natasha often asked herself: is it a rattle I have inside me? I must not think about myself, then I will hold out....

All the winter she had served at the hospital. She had become so accustomed to wounds that they now seemed natural to her; there were obstinate wounds, suppurating wounds; she waged war upon them, dressed them, compelled them to close, to heal. She did not remember her patients by their names or by their faces, but by their wounds. "One would think that you have been doing this sort of thing for twenty years," said Dr. Sabaneyev. He asked her whether she intended to study medicine; she was astonished: "Oh no! I am a Timiryazev student.... I'm only doing this now.... For the duration..." If she were ordered to dig trenches or fill cartridges she would have done it with the same ardour and with the same consciousness that it was only temporary, exceptional—for the duration....

She looked down at her abdomen with amazement: strange that one should be able to give birth to a child now! Why, that was something very peaceful, eternal.... But today there was not even life, the war had turned everything topsy-turvy. Nature alone refuses to reckon with it. Spring will be here soon.... This is due neither to reason nor the heart. Nature—is like the frost, or the thaw....

Natasha never mentioned Vasya. To all her enquiries she received the same reply: not recorded in the lists of either killed, wounded or missing. At first this surprised her: he is missing, but they say he is not.... When she was asked she would answer: "I don't know"... In her heart of hearts she believed that Vasya was alive. Perhaps he is among the partisans? He was not fond of writing, had probably sent three or four letters and they had gone astray.... Men get concussion, this causes partial loss of memory—he has forgotten the address.... He can't be killed! ... Often she wrote to Vasya and hid the letters in her trunk, under her linen.

When she could bear it no longer she reread the letters from her father. Dmitri Alexeyevich wrote rarely, but at length; in jest he once signed himself "Your Special Correspondent." His dispatches breathed such cheerfulness that they comforted Natasha. In February he had already written: "Those colts have galloped right up to Medyn. A pity

that American I wrote you about was not here, why, he thought the Germans would celebrate the New Year in our Chisty Street. I am convinced that, sooner or later, we shall have a look at Unter den Linden, I can't say that I am longing to do so, but we shall. Don't grieve, Natasha, lots of our men are surrounded in the forests, recently a whole unit broke through and came to us, so you can't tell yet. As for those colts, they are not going to rule us, that's clear."...

Natasha had struck up a friendship with Klava Medvedyeva, a student at the Pedagogical Institute now working at one of the evacuated factories. Klava looked like a bird—tiny, shriveled, a tuft on her head, and she sang. . . . Her husband Yegor was an airman. She showed Natasha his letters and his photographs. Yegor was young, he looked ever so much younger than Vasya. He must be very brave—four decorations. It could be seen from his letters that he loves Klava. . . . Natasha knew how they had met, quarreled, and then got married. Yegor described a battle, and Natasha enquired: "What does he mean—got onto his tail?" Klava answered: "I don't know myself. I suppose they've got to do it like that."...

When the factory was transferred here the machines had to be installed in an old waggon builder's yard. The mud was so thick that your boots got stuck. . . . Hutments were put up. At work one's fingers froze. At night the bugs would not let you sleep. But Klava did not complain: "It's war." . . . And that's what everybody said: "It's war." . . . On Red Army Day men from the front spoke at the factory, one of them said: "Comrades, each one of you can make in a day enough mortar shells to exterminate ten thousand Fritzes." . . . When Klava told Natasha about that she clapped her hands: "That's the stuff! Do you do as many as that, Klavochka?..."

Natasha had retained much of her girlishness, but she had become more serious. This was even felt in her letters to her father. One day Dmitri Alexeyevich said with a smile: "How Natasha has grown up! . . . But it's not surprising, she will be having a child of her own soon. . . ."

Natasha gave birth on one of the first days of spring. The thaw had set in, the dripping of water was heard everywhere. Dr. Sabaneyev said: "A fine boy, real prewar." They named him Vasya. Varvara Ilyinichna wanted her grandchild to be named Alexander, but she soon gave way: "Vasili is a nice name, too." Natasha burst out laughing: "I don't think it is. Oleg or Valentine—they are nice names. But Vasya? . . . Sounds like a tomat. . . . But I like it all the same." . . .

She pressed her son to her breast. It seemed to her that he smiled. If she told her mother that she would laugh, of course, but he does smile. Vasya also smiles like that—irresolutely, because he's shy. He couldn't propose, not for anything. . . . He must be different now, everybody changes in a war. How awful. . . . They were together for only one

night, and as though for spite—it was a short night, the shortest night in the year.... But suppose he is dead?... It will be ten months soon.... Tears rolled from her eyes, for the first time she felt that Vasya would not return. She whispered to the child: "You will not even see him.... Vaska.... Vasili Vasilyevich...."

She resumed her duties at the hospital. Work saved her from despair. That spring the war already ceased to amaze, but it had not yet become habitual. The town was in a frenzy. Working at Klava's side was old Agafonova who had two sons in the army, Slutskaya (her husband was killed near Uman), tenth-form schoolgirl Olya, who said: "No news from Father."... The town was in a fever, listened eagerly to the radio, waited for letters, did not know whether to be glad of the sun, of the rumble of carts, of the first snowdrops. But there must be no doubt, they must work—out there they need mortar shells, canvas, canned food.... When you are working you are dive bombing with Yegor, you are with Agafonova's sons (one has gone out to get a "tongue,"* the other is sitting at a campfire), you are with Dmitri Alexeyevich, who is extracting a shell splinter from a shoulder by the glimmer of a primitive kerosene lamp. Work, only work! The town left its site; in thoughts, in dreams, in hourly frenzy it flew to the West; situated a thousand versts from the theatre of war, it was fighting day and night.

Natasha wrote to Vasya:

"Perhaps I am going out of my mind, but just now I am convinced that you are alive. I want to tell you about our son. Mama says that he was born in a bad time, but he was born of love, of that night, Vasya! He does not yet know that we are fighting for him. He has your smile, your eyes, but his nose, I think, is mine—snub-nosed. I can picture what he will be like—your height and a snub nose! I call him tomcat Vaska, don't be jealous, this is another feeling. I will never love anybody as I love you. You would not recognize me. I am working hard, have become businesslike, I don't lark about any more, I'd like to sometimes, but this is not the time for it, when we meet I shall probably be more staid than you. I think a lot about different things—about the war, about death, about why they want to exterminate us, and I feel that even if they launch an offensive in the spring we shall get the upper hand; no, that's not what I wanted to say, I feel that the spring—is ours, like the First of May festival, it doesn't matter that we shall not celebrate it this year, but in our hearts, and our Vasyenka—that is spring too. This is a rambling letter, but I didn't sleep last night, we had some very severe cases, and I can't formulate my thoughts clearly, I wanted to say that the future is with us and for us, that—is the most important. Don't be angry with me for philosophizing. Klava doesn't realize how lucky she

* A prisoner from whom information could be obtained.—Tr.

is that she gets letters from her husband; I see you only in my dreams, just before they wake me up, then I remember what I dreamed, and that is why I am glad they wake me up nearly every night. In my dreams I hug and kiss you, give you all the kisses that I did not give you then, my dear, my darling, Big Vaska—may I call you that? I call him Little Vaska. And you hug me, tighter, tighter, don't let me go, so that I won't be cold, empty."...

She did not finish the letter—she was called to a patient. After that she went out into the street. It was very bright—from the sun, from the white billowy clouds, from the water. Little boys were playing ball. And after what she had gone through the spring went to her head. Will happiness really come some day?...

Natasha hurried home. She was nursing her baby when Klava came, pale, with dull, swollen eyes.

"Have you caught cold?"

"No."

"A letter from Yegor?"

"No. I don't expect one, he warned me that there would not be one for a long time.... I ran in for a minute, I got a half a kilo of sugar. Don't be a fool, you need it, you are nursing the baby...."

This was on the eve of the First of May. Next day Natasha saw the red flags, she smiled—she recalled—just before the war.... They had been kept waiting a long time on Pushkin Street, had sung songs and had larked about. Natasha ate an Eskimo pie.... At last they had marched through the Red Square, she had seen Stalin—quite close—she had marched on the side nearest to the platform.... And when they crossed the bridge there was a tank there, stranded, everybody had expressed amazement at its enormous size. Nobody had thought about war....

I must finish my letter to Vasya. Write about the First of May....

Varvara Ilyinichna took her grandson into her arms.

"Natashenka, have you been to see Klava?"

"No. Why?..."

"Hasn't she told you?..."

The radio broadcast Stalin's order: We must learn to hate the enemy. When Natasha came back from Klava her eyes were dry and stern: I hate them! Oh, how I hate them! I'd like to make shells!... Ten thousand, a hundred....

That night she added to the letter to Vasya: "Klava's husband failed to return to his base, she was informed yesterday. I don't know whether you are alive, I cannot tell a falsehood now, I don't know anything. But we shall win, we must win, otherwise we shall forever feel guilty towards Yegor, towards you! And what will Vasyenka have been born for?..."

When the Gestapo man said: "You killed André Leblanc," Pepe could not conceal his amazement.

"Perhaps you intend to act a comedy. Remember, you'll get no applause..."

Just before dawn Pepe was lying on the floor, battered, exhausted: straining his memory he asked himself: who is that André Leblanc? Did I make a mistake?...

They tortured him for two days and nights. He gave his name: Jean Milet. They got nothing more out of him. He was interrogated by Greiser, who had the reputation among his fellow officials of being a crank: he claimed that during an interrogation psychology was more important than either the lash or ice-cold water. They put Milet into a dark and filthy lavatory for three days. When they took him out he took a few steps and collapsed. He came to on a couch in a bright room. Greiser offered him a cup of broth and ordered another pillow to be brought him. There were flowers on a small table; the noises of the street came through the window.

"You have been badly treated," said Greiser. "Alas, there are cruel people everywhere. . . . Let's talk like friends. I am a German, you are a Frenchman, both love our respective countries. Our nations are no longer at war. But you tried to continue the war. . . . I can understand—youth, romance. There were hotheads among us Germans after the Versailles peace. Do you know what the French did to them? They shot them. International law is against you. Nor is France with you—you have to kill your own Frenchmen. You were wrong in accusing André Leblanc of being a traitor. . . . He was interrogated, no doubt they treated him rough. . . . He did not want to die for the English and divulged everything. We released him. . . ."

Milet looked at the flowers and a vague vision rose before his eyes: the bois de Meudon, Marie—her freckled face, the bronze Cupids. . . .

"I want to release you too. Geminot was an army officer. But you are a workingman. We don't want to punish common people. I will do all in my power to shield you. Tell me, frankly—don't you want to live?"

"And how!" Milet said this to himself, he was in a state of semi-oblivion—tree leaves, Marie's lips, the arbour overgrown with wistarias. . . .

"You will live. For this one thing is needed—tell me who ordered you to kill André Leblanc? I give you my word as an officer that I will shield you. . . ."

Milet tried to collect his thoughts. Who is Geminot? . . . Have they captured Jacques? But he is not an officer. . . . And why do they call Scheller André Leblanc? . . . No, they know nothing, they want to confuse

me! Suddenly Milet felt anger rising in his throat; he looked at Greiser from under his brows.

"All this is a riddle. I don't know any André Leblanc. But if you are sorry for him he must be a rotter, do you understand?"

Greiser smiled.

"You mustn't get excited, you will yet need your nerves. I have some good news for you, you will see Marbeuf in a minute."

"I don't know any Marbeuf. It's not enough that you have tortured me, you want to drive me out of my mind, don't you?..."

Perhaps this is Jacques, thought Milet in horror, or Doré? He was glad to see that it was a stranger. It was a young man in a torn sport suit with a split lip.

Greiser turned to him and said:

"Monsieur Milet looks well, don't you think?"

"This is the first time I'm setting eyes on him."

"Do you too repudiate old friends, Monsieur Milet?"

"I've never set eyes on this man before."

Greiser continued to smile.

"It's all very well being stubborn when you have a good case. I shall have to write a textbook for young terrorists. First lesson: deny everything. Second lesson: if one of you has 'blabbed' try to save your own skin."

A tall good-looking girl was led in. Milet thought to himself: she looks like that girl who came to see Josette, brought greetings from that Russian.... Her hand is bandaged.... Did they torture her too?

"Please sit down, proud Camille alias Madame Richard. Perhaps you remember the night when you were strolling with Monsieur Milet? That was near Mantes?... Don't look at me so angrily, I did not want to offend you. I know you had no time for love that night...."

The girl interrupted him:

"You confront me with a stranger and want me to recall something or other. Torture is better than that...."

"I haven't put a finger on you." Greiser said this in an offended tone. "I have a daughter your age. I want to save you.... So you don't recognize Monsieur Milet? You have a poor memory. Monsieur Glez is much older than you, but he remembers all the details...."

Two soldiers entered supporting a man of about forty with a swollen face. He could scarcely talk. Milet noticed that he had no teeth—he had probably been interrogated for a long time....

"How are you, Monsieur Glez? Pardon me for having to trouble you again.... Look at this youth.... Perhaps you will recall where you have met him?"

"Of course, he's Baudoin, at least that's what Geminot called him. We met in a small café, the Rendez-vous de Pêcheurs, I think it was—on the road from Mantes to Vernon. This was on the twentieth of Sep-

tember at six p.m., he arrived first. We distributed the roles. Geminot knew where the arms were to be dropped. There were five of us in this operation—I, Geminot, Baudoin, Camille and Marbeuf. We parted at four or five o'clock in the morning, I don't quite remember. I did not meet Baudoin again after that."

When both Glez and the girl were led away Greiser said:

"Now you can see that it is useless persisting in your denial. You thought there would be no witnesses, a deserted street, night.... And what about the revolver? At six thirty-five you fired it.... You killed André Leblanc at five o'clock in the morning. I don't know how you spent the day, but you decided to spend the night at Formigé's. You were misled by chance. André Leblanc had told us nothing about Formigé, had either forgotten him or had wanted to shield him. But in the dead man's pocket we found a letter with an address—Boulevard Pasteur, Number Nineteen. We Germans are pedantic, I decided to go and see what this Formigé was like, just in case. He was taken at eight o'clock, and you came along soon after...."

Something was beginning to dawn on Milet. It was all a matter of Formigé.... But he is no Communist! He said he disliked Communists and had consented to shelter Milet only because they had been friends—had been in the same reserve company when they were called up just before the débâcle....

"I was in the army with Formigé," said Milet. "I went to him to ask whether he knew anybody who wanted to sell a bicycle.... Formigé could not have known that I had a revolver."

"You are beginning to talk, that's praiseworthy. But I am not Formigé, I know you had a revolver, I even know how you used it. Now don't be stubborn, tell me who ordered you to kill André Leblanc and you will live, you yourself have confessed that you want to live.... Look at the beautiful day it is, spring will be here soon...."

This went on for over two months: torture, Greiser's fatherly admonitions, confrontations and torture again. Gradually the picture unfolded before Milet's eyes. Marbeuf revealed his identity. His name was Robert Renan, he was a medical student, Geminot was an officer in the reserve, before the war he had been a member of a royalist organization; when they came to arrest him he fired at his pursuers, the fire was returned and he was killed. A man whom they called Baudoin, managed to get away. Glez claimed that Milet was Baudoin.... They called themselves the "Group of the Irreconcilables." Evidently Geminot had been the chief of this group. In September they had received two cases of Tommy guns—the English had dropped them with parachutes. Geminot and Glez had taken the arms to André Leblanc—the maître d'hôtel of the Poularde. A watch was put on them—André Leblanc informed in the middle of October and they were arrested on the second of November. Remembrance Day. When they began to torture him Glez

divulged everything, mentioned Marbeuf and Camille. Glez had gone out of his mind, owing to the beatings he had received, perhaps. He persisted in asserting that Milet had been in Mantes and that he had said: "If we come up against any Germans I will deal with them, you get away."... Greiser chided Milet: "You are angry with poor Glez, but he is putting you in the most favourable light, according to what he says you behaved like a hero."... André Leblanc was killed on New Year's Eve as he was returning home after a jolly supper.

Milet had been prepared for torture, for death, but not for this. When he was tortured in the bathroom (that was the torture chamber) he either remained silent or else emitted nerve-wracking shrieks. He knew he would not mention anybody, and did not. But when he was left alone other things began to torment him. He asked himself: what must I do? Of course these people have also been operating against the Boches. They are comrades and yet not comrades.... Marbeuf—is a good lad, I'd like to shake hands with him and say: You are behaving as if you are a Communist.... That girl is brave, too.... But who are these people? What do they want?... Geminot was an A.F., he dreamed of having a king. One day, before the war, Milet was walking with some comrades; near the Italic Metro station they met a gang of A.F. men. One fellow in a beret shouted: "Red bastards!..." Milet landed him one on the jaw.... A scrap ensued; the police stepped in to protect the A.F. men. Perhaps Geminot was in that gang then? ... Yes, but they are with us now.... The bad thing about it is that they did not do anything, they received two cases of tommy guns and handed them over to a skunk. If only we had got those tommy guns! ... They don't drop any for the Communists, politics.... Marbeuf is a fine lad. They are honest people, but strangers.... If I've got to die, I would like to die with comrades—or alone. André Leblanc was a traitor, men like that deserve to be killed. But Scheller was a far more important bird. Yesterday Greiser let it slip out that they have not discovered who killed Scheller. If he only knew whom he had in front of him! ... Shall I tell?... They will blame Marbeuf and Camille. Why be the cause of their doom? They are not our people, but they are against the Boches, and just now that's the main thing.... Of course, Formigé was in with them, he said to me: "I don't like the Germans or the Russians, but the Russians are in Moscow, the Germans are in Paris, so for the time being I prefer the Russians."... Scheller was removed by Communists, that's to the Party's credit.... I don't know what to do. If only I could see Jacques just for one minute! ... The worst of it is that I can't prove that I have no connection with their group. I was taken at Formigé's, and Glez has gone off his head, swears that I was in Mantes. If I had picked up those cases, would they have fallen into the Boches' hands?... I don't know what Geminot was like. It looks as though they talked more than worked. But I don't want to be the cause of their doom. My number's

up anyhow, but if I tell about Scheller, they will shoot them all. Jacques knows who removed Scheller, he must have written a leaflet about it by now. . . . I have done my job. So I must say nothing. . . .

And Milet said nothing.

A sergeant entered his cell:

"I have been appointed as your counsel for defence, it's going to be a difficult job—you deny all guilt, but everything is against you. I will plead for clemency. You are the only one in the group with an elementary education, that's a weighty argument, you were merely a minor agent. . . ."

It was a military court. One of the judges, a fat man with a red face, sat like a statue without turning his head; not once did he glance at the prisoners. The other judge had a cold, it looked as though he was weeping. The prosecutor kept jumping up and pointing to Milet.

When Milet was asked whether he pleaded guilty to the charge of belonging to the Group of Irreconcilables and of killing André Leblanc he answered:

"If I said nothing when you were manhandling me in the bathroom, do you think I will talk now?"

Glez spoke in detail about the operation in the forest. Formigé pleaded that he was a man of weak character and that explained why he had sheltered people of disrepute; he begged for mercy. Camille answered: "I refuse to recognize the authority of this court." Milet was pleased to hear this and he gave Camille a friendly smile. Marbeuf said that he was fighting for France and did not repent of anything. Milet thought to himself: What a pity I cannot talk! . . . I would tell them about the Communists, I would say that the Boches will have to pay for Peri, that Scheller was only a deposit. . . .

After that they were all ordered to stand up. The fat judge read a lengthy verdict and sentence, nodding his head in rhythm with his reading. The interpreter said: "Milet to be shot, Renan—twenty years, Lucie Richard—ten years, Glez and Formigé—five years." Then he added: "An exceptionally mild sentence, you ought to be pleased."

When Milet was taken back to his cell he thought of death, for the first time—they will come for me soon, perhaps in an hour. . . . I don't want to die. . . . The executions take place on Mont-Valérien. He knew that place well—he had lived in Suresnes for four years. That's where he had met Marie. Jacques' father lived there. He was at the Tours Congress when they broke away and formed our Party. . . . This did not begin yesterday! When Milet had been a small boy his grandfather had told him about the Paris Commune—everybody had rejoiced, but later the Versailles came, they killed his elder brother. . . . The Party is now strong, fewer members, but what sort of members! . . . Maurice must be pleased—how the Party has grown up! . . . I wonder, when we achieve victory, will people like Marbeuf remain with us, or will everything be

as it had been before? . . . Rotten to have to die—I won't know how this will end. . . . Won't see Marie again. She must now be sighing: "Jeannot! . . . My Jeannot! . . ." Her voice goes right through your heart, nobody, not even the finest actress, can say this as she does. In the summer before the war broke out, on the Fourteenth of July, they were together. First at the demonstration. Everybody shouted: "To the wall with Daladier!" But he remained alive, let the Boches enter Paris. . . . Then they had danced in the square near Mouffetard. Marie had said: "I can't dance any more—it's hot," they had sipped lemonade, kissed, and danced again—up to the morning. . . . I wonder how the Russians dance? Henri said—wonderfully. . . . The Russian newspapers must have written about Scheller. Of course the Russians kill more Boches in one minute than we kill in a year, but let them see that—here there are not only Pétain or Laval. . . . Stalin will read how Scheller was popped off and will say: "Good lads, those French." . . . Only he has no time to read—he is in command. . . . The Russians are fighting splendidly. They will soon liberate both Poland and Prague from the Germans, and us too. . . . How good it will be if they come on the Fourteenth of July. Marie will be so glad! . . . Perhaps the Allies will land too. If we manage to get hold of arms, we will take a hand as well. Jacques can command a regiment, a whole division, he understands everything. . . . How is it with Lejean. Can it be that they tortured Lejean? . . . Brutes! Greiser talks about the spring, but has he any feelings? . . . Nine days to the First of May. In the bois de Meudon the lilies of the valley must be in bloom. . . . Once we marched wearing red carnations, swarms of policemen—but they were afraid. . . . It was jolly, the boys sang: "The Young Guard is in the street. Enemies, beware! . . ."

Unable to restrain himself, Milet began to sing: "The Young Guard is in the." . . . A German rushed in and punched him in the jaw.

Milet now thought eagerly about life, thought day and night, recalled the past, tried to peer into the future, embraced Marie, said farewell to his friends. The Germans said he could write a farewell letter to his relations, but he refused. Through one of the prisoners who brought him his skilly he managed to pass a note to a Communist from Ivry who was in the cell below him. He wrote:

"DEAR GREAT PARTY

"I have done everything I was supposed to do. I am meeting death as befits one of your sons. I embrace my comrades. To the very end I will think—the Red Army will be victorious, the French will be victorious, you will be victorious. I am happy that I have been with you in these days. Farewell, my Party.

Pepe-Jean-Milet"

He was shot at six in the morning. The sun was already warming the world. He refused to have his eyes bound, he gazed at the sky of Paris. He cried out: "Farewell..." but he did not finish—a volley rang out.

* 29 *

Vasya said to Krivich:

"You take command now..."

The day before, the partisan unit of which Vasya was in command had forced its way into Lukishky. The bodies of dead Germans were still lying near the last hut on the outskirts of the village. Before the Germans came, partisan Krivich had been the chairman of the Village Soviet. He was a man of about forty with hands that resembled the roots of trees and a sad, dreamy face that on rare occasions was lit up by a fleeting smile. The Germans had killed his wife and children. He had now returned to his native village where he no longer had a house or dear ones. The peasant women crowded around him.

"Ignat Petrovich, we didn't expect to see you!..."

"Do you intend to spend the night here?..."

They thought the partisans would go away at once as they had done in February—raided the village, killed the Germans, and gone off again without even having a warm up.

"We've come to stay now," said Krivich. "Enough! The girls will bring the flag along soon, we'll hoist it..."

This was on the eve of the First of May. After a week of fighting the men had a good sleep. Next morning Krotov, the radio operator, came running in, gasping for breath:

"Stalin's order! Learn to hate the enemy. It's also addressed to us—'Comrades, partisans.'... I have taken it down, but not all of it, it came over too fast..."

They read the order about ten times, congratulated each other. This is a real holiday!... The women baked pies. Later in the day they held a meeting. Vasya was the chairman, he felt agitated; he recalled how it used to be before the war...

"Permit me to declare this meeting to celebrate International Solidarity Day open. I call upon Comrade Krivich, Chairman of the Village Soviet, to speak."

Krivich remained silent for a long while and then shouted at the top of his voice:

"Soviet rule is being restored, that's clear. We must get the sowing done as quickly as we possibly can. We shall get the seed, that's our business as partisans. Here is our banner—red, with fresh blood. For Lukishky—Ivan Dudin, Zakhar Yégorov and Naum Falkovich died like heroes. Dearly have we paid... Comrade Stalin has congratulated us, we must obey his order, since the territory has been liberated we must

sow the crops, and we partisans must not allow the Germans to come back...."

Formerly Krivich had been a good speaker, spoke fluently, had even been sent to Bryansk to a conference. But just now he felt that—his speech was not what it should be. He must end up somehow. He felt a tightness in his throat, and suddenly, not as if he were at a meeting, but as if leading a charge against the enemy, he shouted:

"Hurrah!"

In the evening the partisans danced with the village girls, sang songs. Avanesyan said: "I remember ever so many First of Mays, but there has never been one like this. Everything inside me is bubbling—do you understand? Wonderful!..."

A week later, in this same village of Lukishky, Vasya, Avanesyan and Commissar Drozhnin were poring over a map. Vasya said:

"I don't like the look of it, they are giving way too easily. Sergeyev swears they have a fresh regiment. I hope it's not a trap..."

"We must send the girls to find out," said Avanesyan.

Natasha Golovinskaya and Varya were the eyes of the unit. Before the war Natasha had been a medical student, she had joined the unit in the very first days and had absolutely refused to be a medical orderly: "You have Prakhova, one is enough. I want to fight..." They found her a suitable job. She would go into the German lines. She looked so meek that it was difficult to suspect her: a girl with two short plaits and a pair of childlike, wondering eyes; she was shy and looked frightened, that calmed even the most distrustful. Varya had joined the unit later, in the winter. She was a local girl, knew all the roads and paths; she was a big girl, full breasted, always sleepy-looking; when she passed any Germans she would press her pitcher or basket to her breast in such a way that one would think that it contained all her worldly possessions, and the policemen would laugh and say "she's daft." The girls often went out together: Varya knew the way better, but Natasha was more experienced, knew how to get information, how many Germans there were, and where, whether they had artillery and mortars, whether the Germans in the village were men from the front or "old fogies."—Landwehr.

"Make sure whether it is true that it is a whole regiment," Vasya told the girls. "It doesn't look like it somehow. On the other hand I have a suspicion, it is dry now, the roads are better for them..."

The girls went off. Natasha looked round, gazed at Avanesyan with bright, seemingly bewildered eyes and cried out:

"So long, Comrade Avanesyan!"

"So long, Natasha! Take care girls. Be very careful..."

Vasya guessed what those words meant. He had long observed how Avanesyan and Natasha looked at each other. Nothing had passed between them. Avanesyan was strict with himself: this is not the time for such things. But sometimes he would sit down beside Natasha and sing

to her songs she did not understand, that sounded like a maelstrom; the melodies whirled and sucked one in. And every time Natasha went off to the German lines she would take leave of Avanesyan separately.

Vasya knew Avanesyan now as he had never known anybody before: they had been fighting side by side for a year now. What had they not discussed! Vasya seemed to see a distant city among mountains that resembled huge boulders; there Avanesyan's old mother was still waiting for a letter. Often Avanesyan had wondered whether Natasha, not his, but Vasya's, had safely reached Moscow. For hours they had discussed who was to blame for the disorder that had reigned then, in the summer, when they had wandered along the roads retreating, and when Avanesyan had said: "What a mess." Vasya used to laugh and say: "Muddling through, but we'll get through." They had had a friend—Commissar Shumov, he was killed in March, blown up by a mine. They haven't got a real commissar now. Drozhnin didn't know how to rouse the men—Vasya had often discussed this with Avanesyan too: "You and I will have to act as commissar. Drozhnin is an honest Communist, but a man like that is all right when things are running smoothly, I can picture him in an office with a telephone. The man has lost his head—forest, Germans pushing on, police, rotters in our own ranks. You've got to make quick decisions under these circumstances—this way or that, but he comes running to me for advice, if I say 'yes' he hesitates and says 'I'll ask Avanesyan'. . . ." And Avanesyan would laugh and say: "You are right. He's no commissar, he's a mess."...

Avanesyan had never spoken to Vasya about Natasha. Only once—on Red Army Day, had he been unable to restrain himself. They had had their supper, had had a few drinks; the night was calm, and suddenly Avanesyan said:

"When the war is over I'm going to marry. Do you know whom?"

Vasya burst out laughing:

"Yes, I know."

Vasya often recalled his own Natasha, recalled her like a remote and happy childhood. He would laugh—at twenty-five I was a child, racked my brains how to propose to her. . . . Where is she now? How is Mama? Seryozha? Perhaps it is better not to know: there is still hope. He had seen so much suffering that it was beginning to seem to him to be inevitable, like rain, like the white mist over the fields. The name "Natasha" that he kept hearing all the time harrowed his wound. Her shadow was by his side. . . . But it is difficult to live with a shadow, he missed her merry eyes, her laughter, her warm, childish hands and short fingers, curious, fun-loving, snub-nosed Natashka. . . . There are women who can be loved from a distance, with whom you can correspond for years, and even converse with a thousand versts away without letters. But Natasha was not that kind. . . . And only one short night—on the eve. . . .

Yes, it will soon be a year. How he had changed! He had not lived before, he had gone to school, then to the Institute, read books—about other people's sufferings, had gone to the theatre—where they showed other people's passions; he had had friends, they had talked about what was on the very surface. He had never peered into the nooks and crannies of other people's hearts. And whom had he met? Young architects, fellow employees, a talkative supply agent in a railway car. . . . Life had unfolded itself to him during this war. He saw so much suffering around him, so much nobility of spirit and so much meanness that nobody could describe, and if it were described, people would say—fiction. . . . Will anybody believe that Helen Stepanovna (she was over fifty) had come to him and had said: "I am old, I can't fight, I will do the washing and cooking for the whole unit, my arms are still strong. . . ." She had come after she had set fire to her own hut. Two Germans had put up for the night in her hut; she made pancakes for them, gave them a bottle of home-brew, they got drunk and fell asleep (she said: "snoozed, the accursed ones"). Then she set fire to the hut with the two Germans in it. But there were others, like that slut in Navlya, lived with a Gestapo man, and over the bed—a portrait of her husband—he was serving in the Red Navy. . . . Vasya shot her. He had seen enough traitors too—serving the Germans as village elders, policemen. There was one—Vasya could not forget him—a young fellow, had only just finished his studies, he informed the Germans about a girl, said she was a Young Communist Leaguer, they hanged her; as he pored over a "German Self-taught" textbook, he said: "I will learn German and go to Berlin, I can't live among boors like you." . . . But from the villages came women, invalids, boys and girls who said: "We want to fight." . . . Grisha was thirteen. . . . How much courage, purity there is among the people, you can't find words to describe it! . . . Davydov knew he was going to his death (he set fire to the railway depot); that evening he had sat down beside Vasya and smoked in silence; after a while he said: "You are my namesake, Comrade Commander, my name is Vasili too, I am very pleased. . . ." And then he went off. . . . Vasya said to himself: "I have met the people. . . . They say . . . school, university, but it turns out that the real university is here, you learn not only how to overcome the enemy, but also to understand human beings. . . ."

On May the tenth Varya came back. Vasya guessed at once: something had happened. Avanesyan was sitting at the table unable to tear his eyes from Varya. She reported, military fashion:

"Two regiments, the Three Hundred and Sixteenth has come from the front, was opposite Duminichi, the other is a special service regiment, it has mortars, but no artillery—from Germany. They say—orders are to clear up the district. A lot of bustle, you can see at once that they are preparing. . . ."

Varya sat down on a bench and burst into tears; wept like a child—loudly, wiping her face with her sleeve.

"They have captured Natasha. She went to Dyatlino, said that the elder there was an acquaintance of hers, she could get information from him. . . . I hid for two days, waited for her. Then Fedotov came, he is serving them as a watchman, he said: 'Go. They have tortured her to death, she's a terrible sight.' . . ."

Avanesyan got up, sat down again, wanted to say something, but didn't, and went out of the hut. An hour later he returned with a map.

"Call Drozhnin. I think we ought to get across to the other bank. . . ."

After a short battle they abandoned Lukishky. Krivich was walking along gloomily, carrying a German tommy gun. One of the village women caught up with him:

"Ignat Petrovich!" She was weeping. "We have only just sown the crops. . . . I'll go to the forest, I won't stay here with those parasites. . . ."

Next day they were obliged to abandon the pet of the whole unit—the forty-five millimetre gun. They called her "Bertochka." For five months it had served them. . . . They were marching through a bog. A messenger from Kudryavtsev's unit reported: "We have broken up into small groups. The Germans are attacking on all sides."

The men marched in a gloomy mood. Avanesyan swore: "Damn these mosquitoes, they're worse than the Germans! . . ." But to himself he said: "I don't think we'll get out of this. . . ." A "dragonfly" came over this morning, and then some bombers: so they've discovered us. . . .

They were obliged to carry the wounded. Food had run out, the men marched, tormented by hunger. Krotov reported by radio: "Making for Khvostovichi. Situation grave." . . . Then they heard Moscow. Vasya cocked his head as he always did when he was afraid of missing a word.

"This is Moscow calling. Twenty-two hours thirty minutes Moscow time. Here is the latest news. . . ."

For some reason a vision of prewar Moscow flashed before his eyes, the large globes of the street lamps, people leaving the theatres, he is with Natasha, they had been to the Bolshoi, Gisèle was dying. . . .

"Evening communiqué. . . . Our forces have abandoned Kerch. . . ."

So they are hard pressed over there too. In March they had thought that they would link up with the Red Army any day. At night they could hear a distant rumble. It had sounded like a greeting: hold on, we are coming to the rescue! . . . The partisans had launched an offensive; they had wiped out small enemy garrisons. The territory in which they restored Soviet rule had steadily expanded. "In April I travelled ninety kilometres over our territory," Vasya recalled. "People were merry and lighthearted in the liberated villages. Perhaps that is why it is so hard to bear now. . . . We rejoiced too soon. The men have never been so dejected before. . . ."

Just before dawn they encountered Germans. The battle was a short one. The partisans broke through. Casualties: eleven killed and severely wounded. They carried the wounded away. They also carried Avanesyan away—a bullet had entered his stomach, just below the heart. He died in the daytime without regaining consciousness.

Vasya gazed at his dead friend. Together they had gone through the worst, when the fainthearts had scattered, had changed into civvies, and every hut housed a "son-in-law."... The Germans convoyed prisoners day and night. They had collected men who had been surrounded, local men, and had formed a unit; later men from Bryansk and Orel had joined. At night Avanesyan would tell them about his distant, sun-scorched country—the crystal clear lakes, ringing echoes, dark, graceful girls. But he fell in love with an Orel girl—with flaxen hair. Both are gone now.... Never before had Vasya known such a feeling—grief stuck in his throat, prevented him from breathing, from swallowing a bite.

Drozhnin came up:

"The men are in the dumps, all discouraged...."

"Then rouse them, that's what you are a commissar for."

Drozhnin frowned: that's exactly what he could not do. He could prepare for a lecture, but deliver a rousing speech, no!...

"I managed to do my job this morning, but I can't make a speech."

They dug a grave. There were many yellow flowers around, as bright as bright can be.... Vasya thought to himself: foolish ones, why have you bloomed! You will be trampled upon all the same—this is war.... What nonsense is entering my head! I must talk to the men seriously. Drozhnin can't do it. And they really are down in the dumps. Zvkov says: "Enough to make you want to shoot yourself."...

They lowered Avanesyan into the grave. Vasya said:

"Our beloved Commander Aram Avanesyan died the death of the brave. Only recently he received in silence the news of the death of his beloved and he went into battle with double hatred burning in his heart. Men are wounded in the head, in the chest, in the legs. But everyone of us has a wound in the heart. With that wound we shall go into battle. The enemy is still strong, it's going to be a hard summer. Back over there, on the mainland, our comrades are repelling the attacks of the enemy. We must help them. Remember Commander Avanesyan, remember Sharapov, Natasha Golovinskaya, Ostapenko, Aliev, Zhuravlyov and Fried, remember all those who have fallen. Partisans, we must swear that as long as a single Bolshevik is alive in these forests the invaders will know no peace! We swear to you, friend Avanesyan, we swear to Stalin, we swear to the people! ...

All around the trees rustled, rustled in gusts, whispering something, sobbing, threatening: that evening even the trees took the oath. The sunset was bright red—the sign of a gale.

PART FOUR

* 1 *

THESE are times when people who are chained to the petty things of existence, raise themselves a little and get a broader view of life. This was the case with Olga, who had shocked Nina Georgiyevna by her concern for her furniture and for Semyon Ivanovich's wardrobe. Olga was still the practical woman she had been, and she concerned herself with comfort even in the small room in the wooden house in which the newspaper evacuated from Moscow had taken up its quarters; but she realized that a war was on, and she wanted to play her part in the common cause. She possessed a virtue which even her exacting mother recognized—conscientiousness in her work. Even before the war Olga had astonished her fellow employees by her diligence; she was always the first in the office and the last to leave. Under the new and arduous conditions, conscientiousness was not enough, and serene, phlegmatic Olga now worked with real ardour. When she forgot to go to the shop to get her rations because she had been engaged at the printers' all day, she realized that changes had taken place not only in the vast world, but also within herself.

"I was so taken up with my work, Senya, that I forgot about the ration cards. But the paper came out on time..." Smiling, she added: "It can't be helped—there's a war on..."

"Why push yourself forward? Even the leading newspapers come out late now..."

It seemed to him that Olga glanced at him with disdain; this made him angry: that slip of a girl, thinks too much of herself! What a restless creature she is... And yet he had married her because she had possessed that serenity that is necessary for domestic life. She has let herself go. Well, never mind, when the war's over, everything will slip back into its old groove...

The war had changed the life of big states and of the children that Nina Georgiyevna was in charge of, but even the war had proved impotent in face of Semyon Ivanovich's character. He still thought that the

most important thing was to put in a word at the proper time, and to keep silent when circumstances required it; he was still fond of drinking tea with jam and of sitting with hook and line under a shady tree. But everything had become so uncomfortable, so unstable. Scarcely any of the old staff had remained; the premises were awful; the printing plant was unsuitable for a newspaper. Living conditions were bad, their room was small. Olga performed conjuring tricks—even to drink a glass of tea was a problem, he worked day and night, and only twice during the whole of July had he been able to visit the country house of the Chairman of the City Soviet and fish for gudgeon. But that was only half the trouble; what depressed him was something else—he could not telephone Sidorov and ask how to report the fact that the “Commune” factory was failing to keep up to schedule, and whether it ought to be reported at all. Sidorov was at the front, his place had been taken by Korolyov, and Korolyov had said: “Don’t ring me up about nonsense of that kind. I don’t ask you how to increase output. . . . You are the responsible editor and it is your business to decide.”. . . When conversing with his subordinates, or with visitors, Labazov himself was fond of emphasizing that he was a responsible editor, and he often reminded Olga of this, pronouncing the word “responsible” in an awe-inspiring whisper. After his talk with Korolyov, however, Semyon Ivanovich seemed, somehow, to have sagged, his small eyes disappeared, and his sallow, flabby face looked like a mask; he suddenly realized that he was answerable for everything. “It’s easier at the front,” he said to his wife. Olga smiled ironically. He felt that she was getting out of hand. His staff was laughing at him; even old Zamkov had screwed up courage to say at an impromptu meeting: “Now, in view of the international situation, one must display initiative” (Zamkov was in the habit of calling everything the “international situation”).

Labazov was unable to understand what was going on. Petya Drozdov used to say ironically: “Our editor has a long transmission—if he wets his feet in the autumn he sneezes in May.” Last autumn Labazov had been busy with evacuating the newspaper and with fixing up the new quarters; he had had no time to ponder over events. But when the Germans were driven away from Moscow he said to everybody: “Whatever others may have thought, I foresaw this.” But now he was bewildered—“in the region of Voronezh.”. . . Why, that is in the very heart of the country; from there, as they say in the theatre, you can gallop for three years and not reach the frontier. Thoughts occurred to him that he himself regarded as reprehensible; he murmured: “Er, er—not at all unlikely that the Germans will get here. Very simple—it’s only half the distance from Voronezh to here than it is from Voronezh to the frontier. What will we do then? We can’t keep eternally evacuating. . . .” If Korolyov were to say to him: “You get fired for having ideas like that,” he would pull himself together, but Korolyov had quite

enough on his hands without worrying about what Semyon Ivanovich was feeling.

Olga noticed that her husband had "turned sour," as she put it. She was now obliged to do the work of two. She had never shirked work, but now it gave her a satisfaction that helped her to resign herself to this sad and cheerless life—war time. Vasya was missing, Seryozha was in daily peril, Mama was having a hard time, her husband had turned out to be not only coarse, but also a nonentity, nobody could tell when she would be able to return to Moscow, or what she would find there when she did, somebody may have occupied the apartment; in short, everything had turned out badly. . . . Only while at work can I find peace of mind—I, too, am needed. . . . Regularly, twice a month, she wrote to her mother. Nina Georgiyevna would reply, sometimes in a short letter, and sometimes, forgetting herself, she would converse with her daughter as she would with Seryozha. Sometimes, wishing to comfort Olga, and perhaps herself, she wrote that people were talking a lot about partisans. "Vasya is with them, my heart tells me that." . . .

Recently Nina Georgiyevna had written: "I have confidence in you, Olga. I know that you have not lost heart, you were always a strong-minded girl. The newspaper reports are awful, but I am more convinced than ever that we shall be victorious, and do you know, I have picked up wonderfully. Last autumn I gave way to despair when I heard bad news from the front, but I don't now—if there's bad news it means that we must work twice as hard as before, just to spite the enemy. I often visit the hospital, read to the wounded, mend tunics, speak at meetings, I don't want to be dead before I die." . . . When Olga read that letter she felt that she wanted to press her head to her mother's knees as she was wont to do when she was a child. After all, Mama understands me, we used to quarrel over trifles, but times are different now. . . .

Olga felt very lonely. Semyon Ivanovich would not speak to her for whole days and suddenly he would be rude to her: "Proud chit of a girl! . . ." He demanded that she should attend to his wants: "You have forgotten to sew that button on again! Some head you've got! . . ." Sometimes he passed into a good mood, it seemed to him that they were back in Moscow, that nothing had happened, and after the third glass of tea he would wipe his face with a towel and then embrace Olga. She would push him away: "I want to read." . . .

One day the editorial office received from a group of men at the front an appeal to the people in the rear. The appeal was to be published in the newspaper. Semyon Ivanovich hesitated for a long time, hum'd and hah'd, twice picked up the telephone receiver, but put it back again at once—no, he must not do that; Korolyov will bawl him out. . . . Olga said:

"You must put it in, it will whip up the laggards. . . ."

"But do you realize what it says here? I'll be the one to get the whipping. . . . 'The situation is exceptionally grave. . . . The fate of our country is at stake. . . .' Er, er, no grounds for this. The colours are piled on too thick. Typical panicmongering. I ask you, why 'exceptionally'? Where did they get that from?"

"Look at the *Pravda*. It's put even more strongly there."

"Nothing of the kind, I have looked through all the issues, it says 'grave,' but not 'exceptionally,' or about anything being 'at stake.' It's all the same to them, they are at the front: I am the one who will have to answer for it."

Formerly, when Labazov struck anything out, he did it with pleasure, and scored the proofs with thick, red, wriggly lines. This time, he hesitatingly drew a thin, faint line across the "appeal." Olga shrugged her shoulders and went to the printing office.

Next morning, when Semyon Ivanovich woke up, he was amazed: the bed on which Olga slept was curtained off with a bed sheet.

"What's this, a theatre?" enquired Semyon Ivanovich.

"No, not a theatre, it's simply that I have to adapt myself to circumstances. I don't want to give up the newspaper, but if I go away—it will mean giving it up. It is almost impossible to find a room. That's all."

"What do you mean, that's all? What's that rag for?"

"Can't you guess? I am no longer your wife. I did a foolish thing, but better to correct it late than go on with it. . . . Don't let's talk about it any more, I need my nerves for other. . . ."

Semyon Ivanovich flew into a rage:

"For what other? . . ."

She smiled calmly:

"I haven't got another yet. I am not even thinking about it. . . . I have so much work to do. And besides, what kind of men are there here now? Like you. . . . When the war's over, perhaps I'll find one. . . . Meanwhile, I want you to regard me simply as the sub-editor."

Several days later Olga wrote to her mother about the change that had taken place in her life: "I have practically divorced Semyon Ivanovich. The circumstances now enable you to know a man better. He does not suit me. Write to the same address—it is very hard to get a room, or even half a room, or else the rent is high, and I am saving up for a new dress, the one I have is worn out, I can't even go to the theatre." . . .

I have found a daughter, said Nina Georgiyevna to herself, yes, that's right, found her. How mistaken I was in taking words for the soul, didn't want to understand that she is young, that they talk differently! . . . Nina Georgiyevna was not even offended by Olga's admonitions: "You must insist on being attached to a good store, because you will not be able to hold out long without sugar and fats." . . . Foolish girl, she is having a hard time herself, and yet she is worrying about me.

Sergei smiled: a year ago he had felt vexed—a sapper, I will have to hobble along in the rear; others are fighting, but my job is to build bridges. . . . True, I am in the rear; this is the third week we are letting through tanks, artillery, our division, but we keep blowing up, blowing up—bridges, roads. Yesterday Voronov said: “I built this bridge in nineteen thirty-eight.” . . . We are blowing up what we ourselves have built. But the Germans keep pushing on; they want to cut across our road. Twice we had to engage them in battle to gain half an hour. We can’t leave them a bridge! How long can this go on? Peaceful towns with apple trees and white cottages. In the spring nobody here dreamed that the war would reach them. . . . Steppe. I don’t even want to look, it stretches so far. . . . We shall come to the Don soon. Will they really be allowed to go any further? . . .

Whoever has experienced great sorrow, the grave illness of a dear one, the loss of a friend, knows that the most frightful thing is a recurrence of the illness, a second bereavement. After the rejoicing in the winter, after the great hopes that had been aroused, everything that was happening seemed unbearable. Last summer consternation had reigned, people had no time to collect their thoughts, to ponder over things; now everybody knew what retreat meant. At the word “German” one felt a tightening of the throat, the blood rushed to one’s head. Only recently people had dreamed—the ground will dry and we will move westward. But it turned out differently: The German army was flooding cornfields, orchards, melon fields and the flat, boundless steppe, like a river that had burst its banks.

An old woman said to Sergei: “You talked and talked, and now you are scuttling away.” . . . He did not answer the woman. Now we have to turn away in shame from women, old men and children—we are unable to protect them. We are surrendering to the Germans our crops, our land, our happiness. It is frightfully hot, thick dust hangs over the road, the mouth is dry. The eyes ache. One doesn’t want to look. . . .

“We have abandoned Rostov.” An order. Stern and simple words: we must pull ourselves together! Why, we are abandoning everything (the men say gloomily: “We are scooting”). We have more aircraft now. The anti-tank guns are good. The rear is strong—working hard. . . . But we have not yet learned how to fight.

Sergei used to be rather careless in his habits; before the war he would scold himself—absent-minded, stuck the letter somewhere but don’t remember where; I come an hour too early or else come late. . . . Now he insisted on accuracy and punctuality. Yesterday the Colonel had said: “Wait with the bridge. They will be held up here. The tanks will pass at sixteen hours nought nought.” He said “nought-nought,” but they

passed at seven. . . . And yet this very same Colonel complained: "When I ask for aircraft, they are always late." . . . Communication was bad; the Colonel frankly said: "How do I know where my left neighbour is? . . ." The Divisional Commander is fond of talking about Suvorov; he would shout: "We'll kick them out tomorrow." But when it came to doing something he could not make up his mind, procrastinated. . . . Major Parshin had said: "This will be the C.P. Here we are going to stay, make it as cosy as possible." . . . He put a portrait of his wife on top of a chest of drawers, the men worked for three hours—putting in electric light—in short, complete comfort, but in the evening we hurriedly retreated still further. Gorbunov is poring over the concert programs, verifying the schedule, but German tanks are in the town. And I am a fine one too—near Millerovo I relied on Grinko, and the mines were not laid. For that alone I deserve to be court-martialed.

The heat increased. The dust remained still, motionless. Sergei asked Voronov:

"What do you think, Nikolai, is this going to last long?"

"Yesterday, in the Intelligence Department, they interrogated two Fritzes. They left France in May. They said nobody is left there. Hitler has decided to strike a blow that will finish everything before the winter. They were snivelling, yet one of them had the insolence to say that they were going to India. Absolutely crazy!"

"India, that's sheer nonsense. They drink too much beer, that's why they have such wild dreams. . . ."

"But what about the Allies? This is just the time for them to strike. They have cleared everything out of France. They are taking their last tanks away. . . . Where's their second front?"

"They are in no hurry. They don't like to hurry. I met an Englishman in Paris, an engineer, a nice fellow. As we were leaving the Trade Mission one day he said: 'I'm in a hurry.' His bus was coming up just then. Had he really hurried a bit he would have got on it; but no, he did not even quicken his pace. . . . But I am joking; the French say—it is better to laugh. . . . It is not a matter of temperament. They don't like the Germans. I am afraid they don't like us very much either. . . ."

"You know France, Sergei, tell me, are the French fighting in earnest, or is it mostly talk?"

"Everything is mixed up there. I met a poet in Paris, very refined, if you paid no attention to the meaning of the words, his poems seemed charming, even amazing. But translate those words into ordinary language and you will find that he is just a Fritz—no more profound, and no better. There are happy-go-lucky windbags, solemn gluttons, and the great party that 'serves both sides.' And there are the people. But what can they do? You say there are few Germans there. Yes, too few to repel a landing, but sufficient to keep an unarmed people in submission."

Voronov had become Sergei's closest friend. He was a blue-eyed giant with the smile of a shy child, grey at thirty-two, energetic, but mild-mannered. He was the son of an Archangel lumberjack, had spent his childhood in a remote village on the bank of an immensely wide river, had preserved his love of the forest, the rustle of leaves, the smell of pine, the simple but enigmatic life of nature. At school he had been conspicuous for his ability; the teachers used to say: "You will get on in the world." Voronov did indeed become an efficient constructional engineer. In Leningrad he made the acquaintance of a young student girl named Nina, laughter-loving and endearing. Nina had such tiny hands that Voronov was afraid to squeeze them, and Nina would laugh and say: "You are a white bear, I ought to call you Mishka."* . . . Perhaps that is why they named their son Mishka. They adored the child. When he was away on business, Voronov would ring up Leningrad and ask his wife: "How's Mishka? . . ." His wife and child had remained in Leningrad. He had waited for a letter for a long time, and when, at last, he did receive one from his wife, he did not say anything to anybody. Two weeks later he suddenly looked at Sergei and said with a forced smile: "My Mishka . . . died. Result of the blockade. . . . I feel I could tear their throats with my teeth! All right, let's talk about something else, you can't say all you feel about it, anyhow." . . .

Sergei often received letters from his mother, and from Valya; he read them eagerly, but answered briefly, irregularly. He could not connect what was happening with his life before the war. How strange that Mama should repeat the old prewar words, no doubt she dreamed, and in her emotion puffed hurriedly at her cigarette. If only she did not fall sick! Valya did not complain, but he felt that she was terribly lonely. She wrote that she had been to the theatre and had seen *Three Sisters*. Mama had written that Olya had divorced her husband, that's good, he is a disgusting fellow. . . . People divorce. . . . They must marry too. . . . How remote it all is! As if it were on another planet. Only one thing harmonized with the steppe, with the hot dust and smell of burning, with the shattered bridges, with this heartache.—Nina Georgiyevna's invariable postscripts: "No news from Vasya." . . . War! Sergei was now in its grasp like grass when the steppe catches fire.

An officer was relating: There's fighting in Voronezh, right in the town. We have moved southward from Rostov. Salsk. Kotelnikovo. . . . The breach is widening day after day. German tanks are breaking into our rear. In some places we are fighting stubbornly, in others we are retreating. Homesteads are burning, women are weeping, the pungent smell of wormwood makes the heart sick.

It seemed as though the world had never seen such a babel before. Staid Württemberg bookkeepers were tearing across the Polovtsi steppes

* The pet name for Michael—the appellation given to a bear.—Tr.

like howling dervishes. Who was not here? Fat-faced sergeants who had gorged themselves in the Ukraine, and cadaverous generals with vacant eyes who knew only—"pincers," "encirclement," Heidelberg students with duel scars on their cheeks, dull Pomeranian cattle breeders, dashing S.S. men and grunting, forty-year-old burghers who had savings in the bank, geraniums and haemorrhoids—they were to capture the fabulous wealth of Colchis. Here, too, were Italians, vocalists and boozers, eternal down-and-outs and cardsharps, popular tenors armed with machine guns, captivators of hearts wholly absorbed in the task of purloining eggs, pickpockets in the role of Caesars. Here, too, were Rumanian serfs who owned nothing, the stepsons of fate, and officers from Bucharest who claimed that their ancestors had lived on the Volga, that they were the salt of the earth, that they possessed Parisian chic and powerful friends in Berlin. Here, too, were Magyars, worked up by blood, prodding and homesickness: somebody has wronged them, so they shoot. . . . All these were tearing across the steppe, eating, drinking, defeating, looting, strangling, yelling: Further, further!

They spent the night at a farmhouse. The old man laughed and said to Sergei:

"Your men talked about God. . . ."

"What did they say? . . ."

"That He is angry. That He says: 'What's this? The Russians abolished me, and now, the rascals, they are placing their hopes on me again.' . . ."

"Not a bit funny," answered Sergei. "We place our hopes on somebody else."

"On the Allies?"

"On ourselves."

What a clinging smell! It's wormwood. They say—as bitter as wormwood. . . . The old man treated him to some wine, the wine too had the flavour of the steppe, of scorched grass.

"Wine of the Don," the old man explained, "has a bouquet. . . ."

Sergei recalled that Mado had talked about sweet wine having a bitter aftertaste. Had that really been—the summer of peace, Mado, the studio cluttered with canvases? . . . The Fritzes were there now. The bitter aftertaste? No, worse. . . . And suddenly he laughed:

"It was funny what they said about God. A good thing they can still crack jokes. It shows they are not downhearted. . . ."

More days, versts, dust, wormwood. And at last the Don. . . .

"You are responsible for the bridge," said the Colonel.

Voronov drew up his plan:

"We'll blow it up with Germans on it. I'll take twenty men. The cover is good. We'll manage to get away before they get the range. . . ."

Zonin would not agree at first: it was too risky. Voronov insisted:

"It's absolutely exact. . . ."

They went to inspect the cover. Sergei said:

"When we come back we shall have to put a bridge up. . . ."

Voronov answered in a matter-of-fact way:

"Not here. Three hundred metres lower down. . . ."

It was a rosy morning, as rosy as it can be only in the steppe.

Staff Sergeant Shulyapov said: "Comrade Lieutenant. Please go away. We'll manage this ourselves." Voronov smiled: "I want to keep an eye on this, it's an important job." . . .

First four Germans stepped onto the bridge; they stood there, looked down for some reason, and went back. Through his field glasses Voronov saw two officers in animated conversation. Then one of them raised his arm. When five cars were on the bridge Shulyapov turned the switch of his apparatus. There was an explosion. The whole place was buried under fallen earth. Voronov shook himself. Good! The sapper crept through the grass. Machine guns rattled. Voronov shouted to Shulyapov: "Don't answer. Get away on your hands and knees. . . ."

Next day Staff Sergeant Shulyapov reported to Sergei:

"We have lost Lieutenant Voronov and Private Okhrimenko. The rest have reported. Okhrimenko was killed outright. The Lieutenant was wounded in the head. We dragged him into a hollow. The Germans began to cross at twenty-three hours, they didn't spot us. We wanted to carry the Lieutenant away, he was unconscious. I looked—and saw he was dying. . . . We couldn't wait, we had to get here before dawn. . . . Over a hundred Germans were killed. It was a terrific explosion. I'm surprised we were not buried. . . ."

Shulyapov handed Sergei Voronov's papers and two photographs: a young woman in a beret—happy and laughing, and a little boy. This must be Mishka. . . . Nikolai had never shown anybody these photographs. And so, Voronov is dead. "We'll put it up three hundred metres lower down." . . . He won't be there. . . . But he died like a hero—a hundred Germans, and nearly a whole day gained. . . . A day—what a trifle, it will soon be a month that they have been pushing forward without stopping. And what are a hundred Fritzes? Almost the whole of Europe is here. . . .

Shulyapov saw the troubled look on the Commander's face.

"We'll pay them out for the Lieutenant yet, Comrade Captain, we'll give them such a trouncing that they'll forget their fraus. . . ."

Sergei threw his head back, looked at the Staff Sergeant in surprise and said meditatively, as if he were speaking to himself:

"Of course we'll give them a trouncing. I'm sorry for the Lieutenant. What a man he was! . . . But what's the use of talking. We've got to mine this field path, the fools may take it into their heads to come this way—by the path—in a cultured way. . . ."

Keller took the little girl on his knee; she was three or four years old; in some way she reminded him of his daughter. Gretchen must be a big girl now, he hadn't seen her for two years, she was five now, and Rudi was going to school.

"What's your name?"

The little girl burst into tears, tore herself away and hid behind her mother's skirt. Keller was in an excellent mood: in the first place, from this day on he was a Non-Com; secondly, he had only just emptied a big plateful of curds and cream; and thirdly, judging by the news, all would be over by the winter. That was splendid; nobody could have stood another Russian winter. . . . He recalled—the cold, the lice, swollen feet, an abomination. . . . Perhaps it was a bit too hot now, but it was summer, and almost in Asia. . . . Foolish child, afraid I will bite her. The people are wild here, afraid of strangers. . . .

Keller caught sight of a red-haired pup—a mongrel with crooked legs. He called the pup and wanted to pat it, but it scampered away with its tail between its legs. Even their dogs are wild. . . . But still, it is devilishly interesting, real exotic; soon, very soon, we will be on another continent! Yesterday they had seen a camel. . . . Keller had never dreamed that he would be in these parts. He was a scientist, a man of the study; where could one go before the war—to Berlin, Paris, Switzerland. Touring. . . . But here one saw what one had never dreamed of. It is noble to repudiate war, it is immoral and illogical to kill; but it is as foolish to repudiate war as it is to repudiate love, love too is illogical and immoral. . . .

The villages here are not as poverty-stricken as those we saw last summer; here they have young pigs and fruit, and the wine is not bad, something like Reissling. They found a whole keg of it the other day. . . . A pity Mimi is not here, but that's impossible. It is ridiculous to take offense at the Russians, they are a primitive people and have not studied anthropology; it was no use demanding complex emotions from a savage! . . . At last he had had a pleasant time the night before. True, the girl had cried all night, but there was a charm in that. We did away with many things too soon, we boasted about the new forms; but there are eternal instincts; it is pleasant for a man when a woman is afraid of him—he becomes conscious of his strength. . . .

Keller had remained a model paterfamilias; he wrote Gerda often. Recently he had sent her, with a man who was going on leave, some money, backfat, and a pair of small fur boots that he had found in a Russian house. Lieutenant Krause had said: "Even if the war is not over by Christmas you will have your Christmas tree at home; your leave was due in October, but I have shifted it so that you can spend the holidays with your family." On the whole, Lieutenant Krause was

not such a bad fellow, he talked to Keller as to a man of science, and that was gratifying. Gerda will be delighted. . . . But now he will have his revenge—he will make her feel that he is the master. . . . Of course, Gerda is the mother of his children, but there are moments when she is only a woman, like Mimi, like Lotte, like the red-haired girl he had found in Kharkov.

"I told poor Weber that I was dreaming of the time when I could get back to my books, but he laughed at me; perhaps he was right. . . . It is ridiculous to repudiate science, but this generation has been born for something different. Am I the same Keller who was afraid of being bullied by Klitsch? . . . The Führer is making history, his name will be inscribed on all monuments. Even in Russia. . . . But for us war is not history, it is a frightful, thrilling game. Sit down to work? Speaking candidly, that would be a dull business. Perhaps later on, when I am old. . . . Just now I like something different. I don't know the name of this village, they are all 'hutors'* here; I don't know what may happen to me tomorrow, I may be killed. But I am no longer a playing card, I am a player, and I won't say 'pass.' . . . Yesterday a young fellow from the P. K. said: 'It was the Führer who created us, not God.' . . . That sounds a bit boyish, but there is some truth in it. I was not, of course, created by the Führer, I existed before he came; I read and worked; but the war has remoulded me—I am a different man. . . ."

Keller shared his quarters with Willi, Lieutenant Krause's favourite. Keller was affable with all his buddies, and he was nice to Willi. Willi was a decent lad, typical of the new generation: bold, merry and boastful. He had told Keller that he had a girl named Irma in Frankfurt who was going out of her mind because he was absent from her; but an hour later he confessed that Irma had not allowed him to come near her. He was exceedingly rough with the Russians—not because he was rough by nature, it was simply bravado. Keller had checked him on several occasions. He had stolen a chicken from the woman of the house in which they were quartered. The woman was shrieking as if she were being murdered. It was silly to do a thing like that—we've got to stay here another two days.

"Listen, Willi, I have made it a rule not to take anything in the house in which I have to spend the night. . . . You can find what you want in another house. . . . We must keep on good terms with the local inhabitants. . . ."

Keller took Willi's booty away from him and returned it to the housewife. The woman ran away, pressing her treasure to her breast. Keller laughed: as fussy as a sitting hen, upon my word. . . .

Soon Willi brought another chicken. They roasted it over the coals. Licking his lips Keller said:

* Homesteads.—*Tr.*

"It's like the poularde you get at 'le Cloche' in Dijon, all that's lacking is a bottle of Burgundy."

Willi managed to dig up a bottle of rum. Suddenly, Keller remembered:

"It's my birthday today. A good thing we are resting. . . . I am thirty-four. When he was my age, Dante wrote that he had traversed half his path of life. Let us take it that we have traversed half the road to the capital of the Great Mogul. . . ."

They laughed long and loud. The housewife, with tearstained face, peeped timidly through the window from the yard.

Keller had taken a little more rum than he should have done, but he was only slightly intoxicated. He shouted, sang and strode down the village street, in spite of the fact that the day was very hot. He was enjoying life. A pity that Russian girl is not here. They are all old women and little girls. The young women were probably hiding. This morning Lieutenant Krause was seen walking with a young woman dressed in city clothes. He monopolizes everything. . . .

After their feast they lay down to rest, but Keller felt no inclination for sleep. He made an attempt to read. The novel proved to be dull: it was about a neurasthenic student, the son of a squire, about a girl who was lame but good-looking; talk about a legacy and constancy in love, ninety pages and nothing had happened yet. . . . He laid the book aside and began to amuse himself by frightening the little girl of the house—pretended he was going to shoot her and then threw her some biscuits. Foolish child, afraid to take them. . . . How terrified these people are! If I were my old self I would set about studying the type; you can find all races among the Reds. . . . It's a dull business on the whole, though, far more amusing to sing:

*The only care I've got is:
Where are you Lotte, Lotte? . . .*

But there was no Lotte, nor even that girl of yesterday. . . . He called the pup again, let it pick up the biscuits; no doubt it is hungry. But the pup cowered under the bed and yapped in a disgusting way. . . . Wouldn't let him sleep. . . . Nevertheless, Keller dozed off. He was awakened by a noise at the window. Six o'clock. . . . So he had had two hours' sleep, fine! . . . What are they bawling about out there? An alarm? Lieutenant Krause had promised that they would rest for three days.

Willi came running in very excited:

"What—have you been sleeping? We've caught a Russian spy, a woman. Lieutenant Krause has interrogated her. They are going to hang her in a minute, summarily, according to the laws of war. I didn't know anything. I was playing cards with Strauss, suddenly somebody shouted that Vögler had caught a Russian woman; they found two hand grenades on her, what a fury, eh! . . . Then Lieutenant Krause came out and

said: 'We'll hang her at once.' He ordered Strauss to write on a board that the woman was a bandit, he gave him something to copy from—all in Russian letters, he wrote it beautifully, like an artist. . . . Let's go and look! . . ."

Willi ran on ahead, he was so impatient, but he at once turned back:

"Forgot to load my camera. I used up the whole reel yesterday. This will make a wonderful picture. . . ."

The girl was in a grey dress, torn at the breast: her arms were bound. She was young, seventeen or eighteen, didn't look a bit like a terrorist, kindly eyes, high forehead, hair smoothly combed with a parting in the middle, no doubt a city girl—had been sent on this job. . . . Keller could not tear his eyes away from the small, exposed part of her darkish body.

Sergeant Stellbrecht stepped up to Lieutenant Krause:

"Perhaps it would be more advisable to send her to the Field Police?"

"Why? She told me herself that she intended to throw the grenades at the fuel truck. It is not our business to perform police duties. Those fellows are afraid to show up in the front line. . . . I am a Reichswehr officer, not a Gestapo man, nor a policeman. . . ." After a pause he added: "I don't think we should resort to unnecessary torture, it only serves to increase resistance. I did not even hit her, it was Müller and Vögler who tore her dress when she tried to escape. . . ."

Corporal Wergau was put in charge of the execution. He was a young lad, the son of a cheesemaker, and one of the leaders of the Hitlerjugend in Holstein. In Millerovo he had discovered two Communist women and an old Jew and had hanged them himself. Keller was conscious of a twofold feeling towards him: contempt for his coarseness, and envy—the new generation, didn't have our prejudices, everything was easier for them. . . .

Wergau forced the girl to mount a stool, fastened the rope to a stout bough, tried it to see whether it would bear the weight, jumped and caught the bough and remained suspended for a moment—yes, it was strong enough. . . .

Willi pushed his camera into Keller's hands:

"Snap me as the executioner. It's focused all right. All you have to do is press the button. . . ."

The girl shouted something. During that year Keller had learned a little Russian, but he did not understand what the girl was shouting, all he could catch was: "I am about to die." and "Stalin." Wergau skilfully kicked the stool from under the girl's feet. The girl's body shook convulsively several times.

Schmidt, an elderly and superstitious peasant (he had about a dozen amulets round his neck), sighed mournfully:

"I don't like this. . . ."

Vögler swore:

"Why didn't they give her to us first. The Lieutenant doesn't care, he's got his wench locked up at his house..."

Willi, in great excitement, said to Keller:

"Grand! I'm afraid it was underexposed. Too little light... I'll send the picture to Irma. She'll come running to me when I come home on leave..."

Keller listened to the talk that was going on around him; everybody was talking about the girl, without malice and without pity, dreamingly if anything, and they swore just as dreamingly.

Keller went back to his quarters and wrote a short letter to Gerda: "Today is my birthday, here I have no homemade birthday cake nor your embraces. We are on the edge of the world, tell Rudi that camels are not kept in the Zoo here, but run around free, like horses. I kiss the children and you, my darling doll. Yours ever, Johann." He thought to himself: "It's as well that I did not write about the hanging; no need to rouse such instincts... It's different with us, we are soldiers... Tomorrow I may be killed..."

"Say, Willi, what's the name of that town we are going to?"

"Stalingrad."

The girl had shouted "Stalin." ... They are so naive, those Russians, crazy; they must either kill, or be killed! They have not been created for peaceful development; we'll have to put a strong muzzle on them... There's some sense in hanging them; it would be worse to shoot them, in a war it's all shooting... But there was something exceptional about that girl's convulsions...

Dusk fell. It was impossible to read by the light of the glimmering lamp... Keller felt uncomfortable. How nice it would be to stroll down the brightly lit streets of prewar Heidelberg, to go into a café—the orchestra, the check tablecloths, the waitresses in lace pinafores... Hell! There's always something to prevent you from sleeping among these Russians—either bedbugs, squalling infants or wild tomcats... That lousy pup! A decent dog lies quiet. Shut up! Suddenly Keller laughed:

"You've got a bit of cord, haven't you, Willi? Let's hang the pup, it won't let us sleep..."

As he dozed off Keller thought: "It's been a hectic birthday... I wonder what the year will be like..."

* 1 *

In the daytime it was unbearably hot; the scorched steppe, the desert, yellow and acrid like sulphur; irritates the throat; tormenting thirst. But the nights were already coldish. It never enters one's head that this is due to the weather, that there is such a thing as weather, autumn. The weather consisted of only one thing—a cloudless sky: that meant

that they would come flying over soon. . . . You can't say that you can't move your legs, or that you can't keep your eyes open; your legs move of their own accord, your eyes—it doesn't depend upon you; it's like a loaf of bread, the can of petrol that Nalivaiko is worrying about, like machine-gun cartridge belts, like a tattered map with red and blue circles, ovals and zigzag lines. One thing exists—the battle; everybody knows about it, but nobody can see it, neither Osip, nor Captain Minayev, nor Colonel Ignatov. It seemed as though one had to go up into the stratosphere, or transfer oneself to another age, to get a view of it. It has been raging for over a day, subsiding for a few hours and then flaring up again, reducing men to a stupor, oblivion, to a state of catalepsy, with eyes and hands alert and active and awakened will, which, however, seems like the will of another, and which helps anti-tank gunner Shapovalov to allow a tank to come within a hundred paces, helps gunner Chadushkin to get the range of the teeming enemy second lines, helps Sergeant-Major Nalivaiko to get the ammunition up in time, and tiny Lina Gorelik, after shaking the earth from herself after one of the regular bombings, to bandage battered limbs and ripped bodies. This is something more than fortitude or determination. it's in a man even when he is not thinking about anything, does not remember anything, and it compels the enemy who already sees his goal and, in heated excitement, is pushing towards the Volga as if towards the finish of a race, to mark time, to draw up reserves, to hurl more tanks into the fray, to fill the sky with "Junkers," "Messers" and "Fokkes."

Again that zooming. Dive bombing. . . . Crash and roar, as if all the interplanetary express trains were hurling themselves at top speed upon that hummock which had long been ploughed up and disembowelled, where two hundred men were trying to hold up a division, fresh or battered, the Three Hundred and Seventy-Sixth, or number unknown, to stop tanks on whose sides are depicted rampant elephants with raised trunks, or enigmatic unicorns, or skulls. There were lots and lots of skulls—in helmets, pilot caps and forage caps, with bared teeth, grinning, threatening. The day before yesterday Minayev had seen feet—feet without bodies, without heads, in German boots, in putties. Whose feet, and why had they come here?

This hummock—a grain of sand, a scarcely discernible circle on the Staff map, there are thousands like these—in the steppe, and lower down—in the sand land, and higher up—near the city, right close to the factories. All together they constitute the battle; it has been thought out like a chess problem, complicated like the works of a clock, a huge machine—if Nalivaiko runs out of fuel, if Sergei's sappers fail to repair the crossing, if a single machine gun prematurely falls silent—the spring may break, the human wall may collapse; in this battle everything is logical and everything unforeseen, as in life. But for Osip, for Minayev, for Zarubin, all that exists is this mound, these deep bomb

slits behind the hollow, or ravine as they call it here, Chadushkin's battery, the wire that connects this hummock with Colonel Ignatov's dugout, a steel thread, frail, ready to snap any moment, like the thread of life of each one of them. Stupor, dead tiredness, the ear drums burst, the eyes turn up in their sockets, the mind is benumbed, but you hold on; it is something organic, outside of thought: hold on! Nothing is known except the simplest of things: if a "frame" flies over to pay the first visit it means that "stukas" will come zooming, then the artillery will start, and tanks; Shapovalov and Chizhik will tighten their grip on their guns, Chadushkin, the sweat pouring from him, will aim at the heavy tanks; and if they stop the tanks they will get a breathing space—they will be able to open a can of meat, ask what the latest communiqué says, write a letter, roll a cigarette and take a long draw, and the first draw after repelling an attack—is a return to life.

Wonderfully swift is this return. First, a moment of vacancy; the eyes look, but see nothing; the men wipe their perspiring faces without uttering a word. They can scarcely believe that they are alive. . . . It was during one such moment that Osip recalled that, long, long ago, he had assured Zarubin that fear is due to inexperience, that it becomes "dulled." True, it does become dulled while the other side is banging away, one's mind simply becomes benumbed; but just now it is quiet. Suddenly fear overcomes you, fear of what has passed. What's the use of talking, of course you are afraid, but it is silly to think about it. . . . Osip began to shave, the blade was dull, he cut himself: a good thing Zarubin is so provident, he has some new ones, German. . . .

It is impossible to believe that only an hour ago the ground heaved under one's feet—the men were joking, bawling at each other, arguing about the war, not this one under their noses—the one that was being fought far away. Zarubin brought up a copy of the army newspaper *Boyevoye Znamya*.

"We here don't know anything," shouted Minayev. "We have struck at Vyazma, and at Rzhev. If we break through, it will be all up with the Germans."

Zarubin was chewing a piece of tough sausage; he was, undoubtedly, the slowest man in the world, no wonder Minayev called him "Mister." He said:

"Yesterday, Kranz, from the Seventh Department, caught a German broadcast in which they reported that the Allies have landed. . . . I wrote it down. . . ." Slowly he turned over the leaves of his notebook. "I've got it! Landed near the town of Dieppe."

"Why didn't you tell us at once? You are a real Mister, you are! That's the second front—don't you understand? . . ."

Minayev is a funny chap, nobody has a sharper tongue than he, teases everybody, and yet he goes into raptures. Osip often said to him:

"You are like a rocket."... Just now Minayev wasn't even able to eat; he waved his arms and shouted:

"No, boys! You mustn't underrate this! The second front!... That means, it's all up with the Fritzes—they have chucked all they have over here.... Pity we haven't got a map! Where is this Dieppe, don't you remember, Osip? Far from Paris?"

"No, not far. Everything is near over there..."

"And you say it so calmly!"

"Wait, how impatient you are.... There's nothing about it in the paper, perhaps the Germans just thought it up, or it is only a small raid. I don't want any illusions..."

Minayev, imitating Osip's manner of addressing a meeting, frowned, tapped a meat tin with his pencil and said:

"In the present interval of time, illusions are like weeds, they must be combatted." Stretching his long neck he sang in a falsetto voice: "He who has lost his illusions..."

"Pity we haven't got a gramophone," said Zarubin.

"We'll now sing a duet. Doctor Goebbels will oblige."

Minayev began to sing in a plaintive voice and his little black and tan pup at once began to yelp as though it were mocking Minayev. Osip burst out laughing.

"That's great! Did you teach it to do that?"

"I, no. I have no time for serious training. The Fritzes taught it. I merely discovered its latent talent. Now Doctor Goebbels, to celebrate the opening of the second front, please oblige us with a beautiful pirouette..."

Before the war Minayev had been a student at the Institute of Law. Whenever he was asked what he intended to be, a public prosecutor or a barrister, he would answer: "The director of amateur art in a small regional centre." He surprised Osip by the diversity of his interests—he was a champion swimmer, worshipped chess, knew literature well and could tell a good story; for a long time Osip would not believe what he related, he thought he invented it all; but when he heard him tell Colonel Ignatov how he and the Commissar had caught a saboteur, he spread out his arms in amazement. The story was correct in every detail, but far more interesting than the actual episode....

"I have a brother in Paris, I don't know whether he is alive or not.... An adventurer on the whole, but a good fellow for all that. He told me about his adventures. It was like a novel. If you had heard it you could have written a book about it..."

"I have enough of my own adventures. When the war's over I will write a book about this damned mound, about you, and about my pup. Doctor Goebbels, I'll get a good fee, you'll see..."

It seemed as though Minayev could not talk about anything seriously. Osip envied him: so young, and to have a character like that....

Osip had not told anybody about his grief; perhaps that is why it was so much harder to bear. He said to himself: it's foolish to cling to hope, a year has passed, they were left stranded, that's clear.... Gloom overcame him when his comrades talked about letters, about family allowances, school marks, rooms found or lost, separation, frivolity, faithfulness. Nobody dared share his fears with others, everybody talked in the abstract: "There's a poem in the paper: 'I'm Waiting for You.' I wonder whether it actually is so..." Zarubin would answer in a dispassioned tone: "Some are faithful, some are wagtails," and then his heart sank. Suppose his Mashenka turns out to be a wagtail!

Minayev laughed:

"You are not worried about your own girl, are you? That's good. I am not worried about mine either, but mine is an exceptional case. I had a girl friend. My mother kept on insisting that we go to the Registry Office, but we kept putting it off—we were too deeply in love to be bothered with formalities. I went to Leningrad for a couple of weeks, this was just before the war. When I got back the girl said: "Don't be angry, it's not my fault," in short, an aria from 'Carmen' and an invitation to another man's wedding. So now I am insured against all unpleasantness of that kind."

Minayev even spoke about his mother jokingly: "My Mama is just a darling. She writes: 'I'd go and fight myself.' I can just picture her on this mound! She would think to herself: 'Hitler is standing there. I'll go up to him and give him such a slap!...' She is sixty-three, and still going strong, chops wood..." Minayev did not say that the letters containing those heartening words were difficult to read—that the words were blurred with tears, that his mother was sitting and weeping: "Where is my Mitenka?..."

But her Mitenka had become a good commander. was able to choose the proper place for defence, quickly weigh up the situation and grasp the plan Colonel Ignatov had in his mind even before the latter had finished explaining it. There was one thing Osip scolded him for: "You are foolish to expose yourself the way you do. It's childish..." Minayev did not argue, but did as he saw fit; he felt that he must encourage the men, it was all so frightful, let them know that the same fate awaited them all.

Among the men there were staid ones and boyish ones, courteous Uzbeks, perky Yaroslavians, fishermen, lumberjacks, builders, men of different ages and different trades. With some Minayev talked in a businesslike tone, with others he joked and laughed, and others he teased and made fun of. One of the latter was Lyubimov, a barber in civil life, but now a scout who had gone out several times to get a "tongue." For Lyubimov everything was "historical." When Zarubin ordered him to get to the Colonel's C.P. he would answer: "An histori-

cal assignment," when he related how, before the war, he had gone to the Registry Office with his Lyubochka, he said, "I took an historical decision." One day Minayev teased him; he spilled some makhorka into his palm and said: "Take this, you can roll yourself an historical cigarette." Lyubimov looked up in surprise: "I never talk like that, Comrade Captain." . . .

Late one afternoon Lyubimov volunteered to go out and get a "tongue." "Those Fritzes are rather quiet, they must have something up their sleeve. . . ." Minayev sent him out, the Commissar was away—he had been summoned by the Colonel.

Ignatov's dugout was so filled with tobacco smoke that Osip did not at first notice the strange Major. The Colonel was poring over a map, moving his elbows like wings.

"Quiet at your end? It's the same at Romanovsky's and Babchenko's. They've brought up a new division, that's certain. I don't know which one yet, Romanovsky has promised to find out. They have realized that they won't get through so easily, so they are bringing up additional forces. . . . I have been promised reinforcements tomorrow. How are the men? Worn out?"

Then Ignatov turned to the Major:

"This is Battalion Commissar Alpert, I hope he. . . ."

"Are you from Kiev?" asked the Major.

"Yes."

"What's your wife's name—Raisa Grigoryevna?"

"That's right."

"He's the one. Listen, Comrade Commissar, your wife is looking for you. I discovered you by accident, the Colonel said: 'Battalion Commissar Alpert,' it is not a common name, so I asked him to let you know. . . . I arrived here on the eighteenth, straight from the Western Front, it's hot over there too. . . ."

The Major then went on to describe the attack on Rzhev: it had commenced fairly well, but his regiment had pushed a little too far forward, his neighbour on the right had failed to support him and a grave situation arose. . . . He was so carried away by his story that he forgot about the Commissar's wife, but Osip dared not interrupt him. At last the Major remembered:

"Why, you want to hear about your wife! She is fighting, in my regiment, the Thirtieth. . . . She is a sniper."

Osip jumped up from his seat in astonishment: Raya—a sniper? It's impossible! . . .

"Perhaps you are mistaken, Comrade Major?"

"Oh no, I'm not mistaken. She gave us no peace.—Insisted that we should write to the People's Commissariat, then to the Political Administration. I'm telling you, Raisa Grigoryevna Alpert, from Kiev, husband a Political Instructor—what else do you want? . . . She's got thirty

Fritzes to her account. Red Star, 'For Valour' Medal, it's obvious, I think...."

Ignatov treated them to sausage and fried potatoes, and also vodka. Osip sat and smiled—couldn't hide his feelings. He did not even hear what the Major was saying, he woke up only when the latter said:

"They say the second front has been opened, is that right?"

The Colonel smiled ironically:

"Second front! ... They have cleared out already! I don't know what it was, a reconnaissance, or something just for appearance's sake; but whatever it was, one thing is clear, we have only ourselves to depend upon. Nobody's going to save us, they may yet ask us to save them...."

That night Osip told his friends:

"I have found my wife, do you understand? She's a sniper.... She used to play the piano, Mother would never allow her to wash a shirt—'she's so frail.' Thirty Fritzes to her account! Red Star.... What do you say to that? ... It's like a novel! ..."

Minayev burst out laughing:

"I told you, didn't I? A writer sits at his desk, thinks things out of his head and gets money for it, but fact is stranger than fiction.... Well, Commissar, I congratulate you. Did he say anything about your little daughter? ..."

"No, he doesn't know. She must be with her grandmother. I think so. Raya sent them to the rear."

"Has the Colonel heard anything about the second front?"

"Just bunk. There is no second front. A mere demonstration...."

Minayev flared up:

"What the hell! That's not playing the game! Yet they send us telegrams expressing admiration. No, not playing the game at all. I would say—not behaving like gentlemen. So they unloaded and loaded up again?"

Suddenly Minayev burst out laughing.

"What are you laughing at?"

"I've just remembered some comical lines:

*An English lord
Proud and free,
Staunch and firm
As a patriot.
Fond of honours,
Likes a good feed,
And then takes a nap
On a pleasure boat."*

"Did you think that up?"

"No, it was Polezhayev, when Pushkin was still alive...."

Lyubimov distinguished himself, he brought in a German.

"Here you are, Captain. The fool went to get water. There were two of them. I popped off the other one..."

"What's that blood on your tunic?"

"The bastard struck at me with his dirk. Good job it slipped. I wanted to put him out, but I checked myself. I thought to myself—let them make him talk... He's not a plain Fritz, Comrade Captain..."

Minayev smiled:

"You want to say he's 'an historical one'...?"

"He's no historical one! He's not a plain Fritz, though, he's a first class bastard! I handled him as tenderly as I would a dicky bird, carried him on my back, but he goes and sticks a knife into me..."

And Lyubimov began to swear; and who can tell where this ex-barber, who all his life had trained himself to be polite, had acquired such a fund of oaths—it seemed as though everything inside him was at boiling point, he could not stop himself, and nobody tried to stop him—let him blow off steam..."

When Lyubimov did stop, Osip said:

"Go to Lina, she will dress your wound."

Lyubimov looked at Osip, turned away in confusion and said to Minayev:

"Comrade Captain, I didn't put a finger on him but he, the bastard, hit me on the sly. When you've finished interrogating him let me land him one. He stuck me with his dirk..."

The German stood stiffly at attention and addressed Minayev as "Herr Colonel." He stated that his division had not yet taken part in any big engagement; they had been brought here two weeks before from Nancy.

"We were told that orders were to reach the Volga not later than the twenty-sixth. The day before yesterday we were informed that Stalin-grad had been taken."

"Who announced that, Goebbels? Now then, Doctor Goebbels, confirm it..."

The pup yelped. The German sergeant didn't understand what this meant, but seeing that the Russians were laughing, he smiled politely, just in case.

"What have your officers told you? Why are you sticking here?"

"Our officers say that all's going well at every point, but there is a hitch here, because here..."

"What's here?"

"Herr Colonel, I am a common soldier, I obeyed orders..."

"I am asking you what your officers said."

"They said that we've got madmen against us here..."

At the break of day the German bombers came over. It seemed as though there had been nothing like this before. But perhaps it only seemed so; five days ago, when Magaradze was killed, it had also seemed

as though nothing like it had happened before. One wanted to scream.... When the Germans flew off Lina crawled out and bandaged Junior Lieutenant Baranov's arm—the bone was splintered. The day before, watching Baranov sewing the white undercollar on his tunic, Minayev had said: "You are quite a handy man."... How many killed?... Ignatov promised reinforcements.... Tanks came dashing towards them. Anti-tank gunner Shapovalov took aim, a shell-splinter wounded him in the arm, but he stopped a tank with three shots. Chadushkin aimed at the heavy tanks; one of them approached the hummock. Chadushkin kept banging away. Two shells hit the mound, Zagvozdev was wounded, a third hit the target, the tank's tread was shattered. The German tommy gunners wanted to push on, but they were stopped by machine guns. As was always the case, it was difficult to grasp what was going on, but every man did exactly what was needed; there was neither impulsive passion nor bravado in this, there was only that fierceness that comes from utter weariness and strength of will which had sustained the battalion since the first day of the battle. Minayev's face was hard and stern; unshaven, he looked as though he had aged twenty years; he wiped his face with his sleeve and shouted into the telephone receiver: "Sixteen tanks."... "Messers' over the outfit on the right..." Osip did not think of anything—neither of Raya nor of Stalingrad. Later he did not remember how he had lain down at the machine gun after Zavyalov was killed, how he had shouted to Sergeant Korolyov: "Communists, forward!..."

Then came silence, the longed for but oppressive silence of the first moments, when the men, the earth and the air comes to its senses again. Osip went up to Shapovalov:

"What's the matter with your arm?"

"The skunk, smashed the supports. I saw him coming up, so I dragged the gun up..."

Osip said to Minayev:

"I asked him about his arm—the bone's fractured—but he tells me about the supports. We must write again, and both of us sign it—why are they holding up that decoration? Shapovalov of all people, certainly deserves it..."

Suddenly Minayev smiled:

"You were talking about his arm, but he talked about the supports, eh? Those Fritzies are not such fools after all, we must really be mad. And not only we—Romanovsky's men too, everywhere.... It looks as though they are not going to take Stalingrad."

"If it continues like this, they'll be rolling back within a week..."

It seemed to them that this was the end—another few days, and then the climax. But the battle was only just beginning to flare up.

Raya read and reread Osip's letter, and every time she came to the words "send me your photograph without fail" she smiled in confusion. He won't recognize me. . . . She looked into the mirror as if to verify whether she resembled her former self. No, this is not the Kiev Raya, it is a different one—a Rzhev Raya. . . .

She had found Osip! What happiness this was! She roamed through the woods and smiled—and the woods were decorated in red and gold. Suddenly she halted—she recalled everything, everything that she had long ago forbidden herself to recall: Kiev, Mother sighing heavily behind the wardrobe, Alya, in a green frock, holding dolly Masha and her toy camel—"my camel." . . . Raya was still smiling, but there were tears in her eyes, for the first time during the whole of that year. "Sergeant Raisa Alpert, a participant in the snipers' rally." . . . She wanted to see Osip right now, press her head to his breast and weep—weep for a long, long time.

Again she read the brief letter. Osip did not say where he was—that was not permitted, but she knew that Major Kalyuzhny had gone to Stalingrad. "The situation here is such that it is difficult to concentrate one's thoughts." . . . Perhaps he was killed while the letter was on the way? To find him, only to lose him again at once. . . . Faint-heartedness! As if being at Stalingrad means inevitably being killed. He is not the one to lose heart. Mama used to say: "Osyia is not Lyova, Osyia is strong." . . . Poor Mama, what they did to her! . . . Osip writes that he understands everything, but he cannot picture me with a rifle. But could I have pictured it myself? When I read *Farewell to Arms* I cried. I said to Valya: "Men must be mad to shoot people." . . .

When Raya had dreamed of joining an Extermination Battalion she had not understood what that meant, she had merely felt that life was shifting from the still noisy Kreshchatik to the fields, to the forests, to an unknown world which Polonsky had called the "theatre of war." When she got into the hospital she gave herself up to her work and was happy at the thought: there, even I can be useful! . . . At that time she thought to herself: we will win the war soon, I'll meet Osip, everything will be different, he will understand me, I'll be able to devote myself more to Alya—I have become more mature, I have seen life. . . . She thought of the morrow as of a coming festival. The words "when the war's over" made her heart throb, she pictured the Dnieper, the avenue of chestnut trees, soft music, peace.

But came that frightful day: "Our troops have abandoned Kiev." She continued to do everything as before, dressed wounds, comforted the wounded, was efficient and affable; nobody guessed that behind that smile, behind that caress, behind those eyes shaded by those long lashes, there was nothing but coldness and death.

They were stationed near Rostov. The wind hurled the hard snow into one's face. Some wounded men were brought in. For the first time Raya saw Germans. Have I got to nurse them? . . . A week before a woman had arrived from Kiev, and she had related: "They killed them in Babby Yar. . . . And children too. . . ." Perhaps this one killed Alya? . . .

"Were you in Kiev? Do you understand me? Kiev?"

The German nodded.

That evening Raya went to see Lyzhkov:

"Comrade Commissar, permit me to hand in an application for transfer. . . ."

Lyzhkov read the paper and enquired ironically:

"You want to go where it's livelier, eh?"

"No, my little daughter remained in Kiev, and my husband's mother. . . ."

"But you are doing useful work here too."

"I know, but I can't stand it any longer. . . . I must kill."

She said this in such a tone that Lyzhkov turned his head away.

She learned to shoot; the instructors said she had a good eye and a steady arm. But she was not shooting anybody. What am I doing here? I'd do better nursing the wounded. . . . She was a young woman and was living among men; there were many things that were difficult to get accustomed to. Some of the men tried to flirt with her, but she snapped at them: "Drop that. I am not one of those." . . . One lieutenant said: "She's not a girl, she's a flint!"

Kosikov was a broad-shouldered, taciturn Siberian. On seeing Raya for the first time he looked her up and down distrustfully: a pewit. But later on he said with pride: "I taught her." . . .

She would never forget the day she killed her first German. It was a bright spring day; the barely verdant treetops looked like lace. Kosikov asked her: "Can you see? . . ." Raya saw the horns of a trench periscope. She waited: her whole life was concentrated in her eyes—she must not miss. Two or three hours later a German's head appeared, evidently he was being relieved. Raya did not miss. Kosikov said: "Don't get swelled-headed, now, you were just lucky to get a hit at the first shot. . . ." Raya was conscious of a feeling of great relief, as if a weight had been lifted from her heart.

At one time she had been fond of Chopin, had sighed over "Spring Waters," had been disappointed when Osip had not noticed that she had done her hair in a new way. . . . But now they were saying about her: "She has exceptional eye-judgment, knows the strength of the wind, and she's calm—she can wait for the proper moment. . . . She has twenty-eight to her account. . . ." But all she lived for now was—not to miss the twenty-ninth. Two lives. Yes, and two women. . . . But perhaps only one heart, the old one—when the war ends (will it ever end?) Ser

geant Raisa Alpert will become Raya again, will play nocturnes, shed tears over a novel, whisper to Osip: "Darling, don't go away..." No, that will never be, it can't!... I must kill the twenty-ninth... Alya is dead. And I am dead, too... Osip wrote to a different woman, to the former one... Why am I thinking about myself? Osip is at Stalingrad....

The steppe, in the South, a distant unfamiliar city. They say it is very long, and all white. It must be black now... Everything is being decided there. Surprising that it should have such a name—Stalingrad. It can't be accidental... They must not be allowed to get into it. How is it they can't understand that?...

In the distance Raya saw the ruffled surface of a river. The Volga. How long it is! Here there are forests, bogs, difficult to cross—they suck you in. The day before a motor truck got stuck and could not be pulled out. But Osip is in the steppe. If a twig were dropped into the river it would reach him....

For over a month they had been attacking Rzhev; they had captured the aerodrome; but the Germans still held the Army Camp; two buildings loomed in front of their eyes, one slightly taller than the other, they had dubbed them "Colonel" and "Lieutenant-Colonel." To the right was Rzhev; from a distance it looked intact, but many of the houses were gutted, only the walls were left. The Germans were living in dugouts. Just in front of the town there was a small wood, part held by our forces, part by the Germans. Scouts crept out in camouflage coveralls, looking like futurist pictures. In Captain Gorokhov's battalion there were many Uzbeks; well-built, dark-skinned, in camouflage coveralls—they looked like the warriors in Eastern fairy tales. But this is not a fairy tale—deep, dark dugouts, trenches in which the mud quacks under your feet, every inch riddled by shells; fire day and night, iron, very much iron—wrecked tanks, dense barbed wire, helmets. The ground is tightly stuffed with shell splinters, half-decayed human corpses, mortar shells, wreckage of motor trucks, horse skulls and excrement. In a tiny area tens of thousands of men were living and dying. Sometimes the Germans were heard talking or singing. When any "Ils" flew over, our men screwed up their eyes, praying that they did not make a mistake... At night the "vegetable gardener" dropped bombs on the town, and everything that could still burn, burned. The men talked about makhorka, about signals girl Manya who had moved into the Captain's dugout, about the army stores, said they ought to write to the newspaper to complain about letters going astray. Then an attack would be launched—two blocks captured. The blocks had disappeared long ago, there were only squares on a map, heaps of rubble, broken glass, mud. They must push forward a hundred paces. The batteries search for each other. Mortars search for men; when the mortars fall silent for a moment the rattle of machine guns is heard. Mud sticks to your face. Then your hand

feels sticky: blood. They count up the number of killed and the trophies captured. A member of the Military Council goes over the list of those recommended for decoration. By the light of a primitive kerosene lamp the men hunt for "tommy gunners," that's what they call vermin. There is a long argument about when the hundred-gram vodka ration would be issued, in October or November. The long-whiskered Sergeant-Major says: "We'll have a good sleep at last, today."... Half an hour later he is lying dead near the F.P.O.—a solitary shell, which seemed to have gone astray, had burst near him. There is an extraordinary monotony of words, scenes and actions. "They've hung the lamps up, they'll be starting in a minute."... "Dive bombing, the bastard."... "Oka, this is Carnation speaking."... "Get off the line, damn you."... "Describe the situation."... "At nineteen hours nought nought, square forty-six"... "Give me a drink, Nurse."... And behind all this there is the ferocity of the second year of war, a fury which has no more words left with which to express itself.

Onlookers may have wondered at these fruitless attempts to capture the shells of burnt-out buildings. General Sedelnikov kept on repeating: "To divert forces from Stalingrad." And this was known not only by this taciturn General with the bloated face and coarse grey hair, whose orderly uselessly made the narrow child's cot for him every night, who dozed at the table over his map, a lonely, ageing man without a wife, without children, who had devoted his whole life to the army. It was also known by handsome Mirza Alimov, who had left his beautiful Esther in the pomegranate grove. Everybody knew it. Over the shell craters, over the muddy trenches, over those accursed, log-lined roads along which the motor trucks crept, over Sedelnikov's "outfit," over the thunder of explosions, over the groans and agony of the dying—hovered the one word—Stalingrad.

Raya tried not to recall anything. If I recall anything, I'll miss.... She must without fail lay out that machine gunner—he is a nuisance.... Now she no longer thought: "He killed Alya," or "he is a German": all she thought of was "he is a nuisance." The war was within her now.

Raya went into the dugout to get warm; still four hours before dawn, and the nights were cold. It was difficult to breathe—because of the breath of the men, the warm damp clothing. Lieutenant Miletsky was sitting at the kerosene lamp: "Congratulate you on your twenty-ninth," he said. "Now for the jubilee, the thirtieth." Miletsky stared blankly at the map which he knew down to every tiny line, down to the former premises of the Industrial Co-operative Building at the corner of two former streets in square forty-nine. Or perhaps he was sleeping with his eyes open. Suddenly Raya recalled: Osip is alive! What if the war ends, they survive, and meet!... It is foolish to dream.... She drew from her knapsack the letter she had written the day before, and in

which she had enclosed her portrait clipped from the army newspaper. The photographer had made her raise her head and put on a dashing smile. The spit of Zaitsev. . . . (Zaitsev was a fair-haired lad, song leader and accordion player). Raya looked at the tiny handwriting in the letter. Why did I write this? There is no need for him to know that Mama and Alya remained behind. He is near Stalingrad. . . . He is having a hard enough time as it is. She tore up the letter and across the portrait she wrote: "Darling, I cannot write, I am much too happy that I have found you. I will write to you soon, at present I am sending you this portrait, only don't think I am like that, the photographer was over-zealous. For you I am what I was before—Kiev Raya."

* 6 *

Richter's face beamed when Colonel Gabler's orderly arrived with an invitation from the Colonel. Six years ago Richter had built a country house for the Colonel, and the latter had been pleased with it: "A fine combination of the old German spirit with modern comfort." After that Gabler had invited the architect to his home now and again. A week ago Richter had written to the Colonel congratulating him on his receipt of the Ritter Kreuz; he did not expect that he would receive an invitation from Gabler in reply.

This was the fifth day that Richter's battalion had been resting. It was high time, everybody's nerves were worn to a frazzle. . . . It was said that things were far better in the South—the Russians were in flight, our forces were in the Caucasus, Stalingrad would be cleared entirely within a few days. But here—it was hell. He would never forget this accursed Rzhev. . . . He had already heard last autumn about the Russian guns which belched a large number of shells all at once. A devilish contrivance! Now he was having a taste of this music himself. It was enough to drive one mad. An "Ivan" who had been taken prisoner had called them "Katyushas." . . . It was impossible to understand people who gave this tender feminine name to a frightful thing like that. . . . But they won't get anywhere even with their "Katyushas." It is good that Colonel Gabler is in command here, he is no upstart, he is an old, experienced officer. It is a great honour for me, a Non-Com, to receive an invitation from the Colonel. I can imagine how Gase envies me. Cockroach's whiskers twiddled when the orderly arrived. . . .

Colonel Gabler had his quarters in a two-storey wooden house; this had been a school when the Reds were here; it had all been painted anew. Richter smiled: this was German genius—an arbour of birch trunks, benches of the same material, gates, all white, Nordic, fits in with the landscape and at the same time reminds one of Biedermeier—of old, burgher Germany.

Inside, the house was bright and clean, a polished floor, flowers in pots, pictures on the plank walls; the smell of eau de Cologne and cigars pervaded the place. The Colonel had aged during the past six years—it was not surprising—three campaigns! He was no doubt sixty. Richter saluted him as a subordinate, but Gabler proffered his hand.

"Take a seat and forget about rank, I am pleased to meet an old acquaintance. One sees only officers nowadays, but one wants to unburden one's heart sometimes, to talk to a man of culture, to an artist. I suppose you find it boring to look at these Russian hovels, one forgets that there is such a thing as architecture. By the by, I saw some curious churches in Smolensk. . . ."

"Yes, there are one or two monuments of architecture there. Ancient Russian architecture lacks breadth, one feels the narrow-mindedness of the tiller of the soil, or of the herdsman, but it is nice in a way. . . ."

Gabler smiled, and his stern face at once became affable—in place of the soldier, a kind grandfather was sitting there.

"Speaking generally, Herr Richter, antiquity is always attractive, only old men like me become monuments too soon—the young men are eager to take their places. . . ."

They talked about youth, about the frivolity of the French, the beauty of ancient German cities, about the Colonel's grandson who had distinguished himself in the air fighting in the South, about Hilde (Gabler did not forget to enquire about her), about how difficult it is to live without good music, one gets coarser every day. The Colonel did not talk about the war, he merely asked: "Are things hard on your sector?" and when Richter frankly confessed that things were hard, Gabler said meditatively: "We are occupying an unfavourable position, but it can't be helped; the Führer cannot relieve the pressure on the South. We have to be on the defensive. . . . A pity, we are destroying the flower of the army here, the veterans of the winter campaign." . . .

Richter very much wanted to ask how things were going in the South and whether the war would end before the winter, but he did not dare. And Gabler again turned the conversation to music.

"I don't like Wagner, I suppose I am too old. I prefer music that helps one to forget reality. I like Schubert, Schumann. . . . You are an artist. I will not conceal from you that I like Mendelssohn, although he is turned down now for political reasons. He expresses German tenderness."

Richter was pleased now that he had at one time gone to concerts with Hilde—it would have been awkward to have appeared ignorant in these matters. As regards Mendelssohn, the Colonel was right—the Nazis are good fighters, but they tear out the flowers with the nettles. . . . This analogy pleased Richter so much that he screwed up courage to say to the Colonel:

"Young people often, when destroying thorns, also destroy the roses."

Again the Colonel smiled sadly:

"Sometimes they take the roses for thorns."

The field telephone buzzed. Richter jumped up and wanted to leave the room, but Gabler motioned to him to stay.

"What division is that? Sixty men left in the Three Hundred and Forty-Seventh. If it is not withdrawn for replacements and reorganization I shall not be responsible. Yes, precisely, you can say that I shall not be responsible. . . ."

The Colonel offered Richter a cigar, lit up, was silent for a while, and then burst out angrily:

"It is high time to understand that this is not last year, the Russians have learned a great deal. The situation in the South is complicated. I am absolutely convinced of the superiority of our forces, but the bad thing about it is that every whippersnapper pokes his nose in. . . . To command a fighting unit is at least as difficult as conducting an orchestra. I am very fond of music, but I assure you, Herr Richter, that it would never enter my head to get up in front of a music stand and wave a baton. One must be able to appraise the enemy's strength in good time and properly deploy one's own forces. The side that scatters its forces loses. I have no doubt that we shall win, but the present heavy casualties could be avoided. . . . Youth, of course, is a great force, but the young have still something to learn from the old. . . ."

Richter thought to himself: I don't come from the Hitlerjugend either, and he smiled respectfully.

The Colonel recovered his composure; he recalled that Richter had spoken to him about his journey to Siberia.

"This is not the first time you are here, is it? Do you speak Russian?"

"I have learnt a little during the past year. When I was here before the war I spoke German."

"That means that you spoke to intellectuals, but there are few of those here. What do you think—do the Russians really hate us, or is it something else—compulsion, stupidity, mass psychosis?"

"I hesitate to answer you. I ask myself that question. . . . I think their minds have been turned against us and they believe their leaders. To them we represent not only a hostile idea but also an alien world. I have talked with the poor here, I assure you that they lived a hard life under the Bolsheviks, I said to them: 'There may be some excesses, but this is war; when we win we will send you cloth and utensils.' An elderly man, not a Communist, just a plain individual, answered: 'We don't want anything of yours.' . . . He was afraid to say right out what he thought, but I understood him to mean that he preferred his own regime. They are absolutely crazy about it."

"You are quite right. I think so too. I merely wanted to hear the opinion of a man of a different generation, of a different milieu. We

should have thought about all this before. . . . Now Germany has only one hope—our soldier's honour, the skill of our army. I am convinced that we shall bring the Russians to their knees, but we must do it before anything starts in the West. . . . They are not ready, and they are in no hurry, they have their own plans, and their cunning cannot be denied. I don't think they have any objection to Russia being defeated, on the condition, of course, that it will weaken us. We cannot afford a war on two fronts. I said that as far back as last autumn. Ancient Rome is now in fashion among us; just before you came I read in the *Beobachter* that we are 'priests of Mars.' Why don't those 'classics' recall another god—Janus? In peace time the Romans closed his temples, but in time of war they worshipped precisely Janus—he has two faces, he looks forward and behind, to the East and to the West. A pity we did not have a Janus in the summer of nineteen forty after Compiègne, or in the spring of nineteen forty-one"—the Colonel said this with a smile, then his face became stern. "But now, Herr Richter, we are in the autumn of nineteen forty-two. As the French say: The wine is poured out, we must drink it. And our grenadiers will not falter. . . ."

Gabler said he was pleased to have met Richter, and with that the conversation ended.

When Richter arrived back in his unit everybody crowded round him; nobody dared ask him how it had been at the Colonel's. But Richter said nothing; he did not know what to say. Cockroach could not restrain himself any longer:

"Didn't he say whether it would finish in the South soon?"

"Soon."

"I thought so. And when it finishes in the South the Russians here will flop. If only it ends before the winter! . . ."

Everybody gazed at Richter as if he were a celebrity; only Marabou kept aloof, took no part in the general conversation. In the evening, taking the opportunity when Richter was alone, he asked him:

"How did you find Gabler?"

"In good form" (Richter was a little afraid of Marabou, and when talking to him he weighed every word).

"Strange. . . . He belongs to the old school of military men. They hold that the theories of Clausewitz and Moltke will win the day. But it is the historical fatalism of the Führer that will win. Even if half the population of Germany perishes at Stalingrad, Stalingrad will be ours."

Richter made no attempt to contest this; as always, Marabou upset him with his gloomy forecasts. But he wanted to have pleasant thoughts as he sank into slumber. The Colonel had said that the Allies were playing a cunning game. That's to our advantage. . . . Perhaps the Führer foresaw this? If so, he will outwit all the cunning tricksters. In the beginning everybody said that he was a fanatic. But after Munich even the sceptics admitted that he was a splendid strategist. Gabler, no doubt.

dislikes the Nazis, as all the old military men do. Perhaps he under-rates them? But the Führer is like Janus, he has one face looking towards the East and another looking towards the West. . . . Be that as it may, it was pleasant visiting the Colonel. . . . He may help me with my leave. . . . I will not write Hilde, I will come upon her suddenly—I must be resolute, find out what is going on. . . . What did Marabou say? Historical fatalism. . . .

* 7 *

Louis was walking along the Strand. It was a warm, slightly misty day. London looked pale and wan, like a patient recovering from an illness. People had forgotten the bombings, and the ruins had ceased to frighten them, they had become part of the landscape. They talked about minor discomforts. Cigarette smokers envied pipe smokers: you could get tobacco everywhere, but it was hard to get cigarettes. The newspapers were taken up with the remote war in Russia. Londoners stuck little flags on maps, expressed admiration for the Red Army, said: "Only Russians are capable of doing things like that"; everything was mixed up here—admiration and horror, pity and awe. At a banquet given in honour of the Voluntary Fire Brigades a professor, proposing a toast to allied Russia, said: "The Battle of Stalingrad is a combination of modern technology and primordial chaos, an H. G. Wells novel interpreted by Tolstoy's Platon Karatayev." . . . From time to time Londoners recalled the frightful year they had waited for death in the Underground and in bomb slits, when schoolchildren extinguished incendiary bombs, and elderly clerks marched in military formation, ready to repel the enemy. We held out, it's not our turn now, said Londoners to themselves. . . . And yet, when reading the newspaper reports of the Battle of Stalingrad, many of them wondered: What are we waiting for?

"What are they waiting for," thought Louis. Over two years had passed since the fisherman's sailing boat had moored on England's shore. During the first year conditions were such that Louis had had no time to think: combat flights nearly every night; he brought down three enemy planes; six months he spent in hospital having his wounded leg set right; he had lived only for one thing—to defend London. The mutilated city, screaming with the voices of sirens, had seemed to him to be his own native city. He had been happy that he had left France, he had carried her away with him, was fighting for her over London.

How long ago that had been! The war had receded somewhere into the distance. People talked about this with relief. But Louis was tormented by the thought: the Boches are still in Paris, but he must remain here, waiting, heaven knows what for.

When he first arrived he had visions of his mother's grave with the faded roses. He recalled the campfires of the refugees, the dead bodies

of little children, women with eyes swollen with tears. He had said farewell to Mado on a dark night, she had embraced him, could not let him go. What has become of her? What has become of France?

A year passed. Somehow, Louis managed to get hold of a pile of Paris newspapers; he read them, but could not understand. Theatres, familiar names of actors, book announcements, apartments to let, anti-quaries selling carpets, a lady had lost her poodle.... Suddenly his eye caught an announcement in the "Society Column": "Married. The well-known industrialist, engineer and officer, Monsieur Joseph Berty, Member of the Legion of Honour, to Mademoiselle Madeleine Lancier. In view of the present situation, the ceremony was attended only by the relatives and intimate friends of the young couple." Louis crumpled the newspaper. Disgusting! Berty was a respectable man, of course, but fancy celebrating weddings under the rule of the Germans!... Is the whole of France thinking like his father?... It cannot be! Brave men arrive from there and relate that the French are not submitting, that Boches are killed at night, that trains are derailed. Perhaps all this—the theatres, the books and weddings—are just camouflage? Mado is incapable of doing a low thing. If she has bound up her fate with Berty at a frightful time like this, it shows that Berty is a patriot, belongs to the Resistance, is risking his life every day. Being here, one cannot understand anything. If only they would make a landing!... Over there, to chase the Boches out!

Before the war Louis was of the opinion that politics was a dull and sordid business. First people shout at meetings, promise a heaven on earth, abuse their rivals; then the deputies assemble in the Palais Bourbon, some form a government, others overthrow it; the Communists say that the Left Republicans are mixed up in swindles, that they are dishonest; and the Left Republicans say that the Communists are "paid agents." It was all disgusting.... His father had dreamt of him becoming a lawyer.... But Louis had hated rhetoric: if a man had a smooth tongue it meant that he was a rascal.... He was a handsome lad—tall, dark, with an oval face—he looked like a Spaniard. The girls liked him, but he never indulged in light flirtations, nor had he really fallen in love. He had grown up amidst talk about art and that lightness of manner that Lancier was so fond of; he had hated poetry ("why talk in rhyme?"); he had longed for danger; that is why he became an airman. The war had taught him a great deal; he experienced the débâcle, realized that life was not a sporting contest. In the summer of nineteen forty he had looked at every cottage, at every lime tree, with love and despair. This was France, his France, and he was surrendering her!... When his father began to speak in defence of Pétain he realized that politics had poisoned everybody. They were prepared to renounce their Motherland to save their pockets.... He was told that there was a general who was calling for resistance. He found a place in a sailing boat.

In London he at last saw de Gaulle. Louis was surprised to hear the English talk about "Free France" in a friendly but patronizing tone. Why? . . . It was difficult to concentrate one's thoughts: a gigantic air battle was in progress.

He began to think when the lull set in. People talked about nothing except the Russians. Last autumn everybody had thought that the Russians were beaten, then people began to say that the Russians would smash the Germans, after that they again said that it was all up with the Russians. And Louis had to hang around and smoke cigarettes—they were issued to the forces. . . . Had politics something to do with this too? One could keep away from election meetings. But it was different now. . . . You say "I am ready to sacrifice my life," but your life is controlled by politicians in the same way as they formerly controlled taxation and pensions. . . . Why don't they open the second front? He often asked his English friends this question. They answered: "We are not ready yet. We don't want another Dunkerque." . . . He did not argue with them, but in his heart he was indignant: what do they care about France? They are glad that they are not being bombed any more. . . . He became suspicious, it seemed to him that the English looked down upon him—they had successfully defended London, but the French had surrendered Paris. . . . France was not a state to them, but a prospective theatre of war: "When we have thoroughly prepared we shall land. . . ." Nobody took any notice of the tall general, he was lost in a large, alien city.

Only recently Louis had talked to Major Davis. Before the war Davis had spent a vacation in Brittany, he liked the French people. Louis asked him:

"Why aren't they opening the second front?"

"It would be risky to do so just now. It's true, of course, that the Germans have transferred many divisions to Russia, but they have fortified the coast and have left garrisons in France. They have shown quite enough what they are capable of. If we attempt a landing now they may throw us back into the sea. It is wiser to wait. Why cause unnecessary casualties?"

"But aren't you afraid of miscalculating. We looked on with folded arms when the Germans captured Warsaw. You know what that led to. . . ."

"That's not a fair analogy. The Poles could not weaken the Germans, but it's different with the Red Army. In the autumn the Germans were already complaining that victory was costing them too dear."

"Are you sure that the Russians will be able to cope with them?"

"No. It looks as though Stalingrad is living its last hours. That means that the Russians will be cut off from oil. This will not put a stop to resistance in Russia, but it will become disorganized. Hitler will

achieve another victory, but it will be a Pyrrhic victory. We will deliver the finishing stroke...."

Louis did not know what to say in reply: Davis was a regular army officer, he understood strategy, and there was logic in what he said. But still....

"Perhaps you are right," he said. "But we airmen have a rule—when one of us is attacked we all go to his assistance. In my opinion, this law applies not only in air fighting...."

The Major smiled and his brick-red, weather-beaten face looked naive.

"I understand you, and I personally feel uneasy when I think of the Russians.... But what would you have? We are human. You love France most of all, the Russians love Russia, I love England. The life of an English lad is dearer to me than the life of a Russian. This may sound inhuman, but then, war is an inhuman affair. I am a soldier, and I am not very much interested in politics; but there are people who think about these things. My father-in-law is a Member of Parliament, and he explained to me that the German offensive is to our advantage. If the Bolsheviks are defeated, we will help the Russians to build up a state more akin to ours. But even if the Bolsheviks retain some territory at the time Germany collapses, they will have been weakened to such an extent that they will be unable to oppose our plans. Of course, this is politics, and I don't know how far my father-in-law is competent to judge.... I object to a premature landing from the military point of view. Nothing prevents me from admiring the defenders of Stalingrad even if they are arch-Communists.

This conversation plunged Louis into gloom. There is Mama's grave, there is France, and there are these damned politics.... Frightful news is coming from France. Laval is faithfully serving the Germans. People are being forcibly sent to Germany. General Stülpnagel is shooting hostages. But these English won't save France because Davis' father-in-law fears the Bolsheviks, just as in nineteen thirty-six father had feared Lejean!....

Louis' comrade, André, came running in, and without greeting him exclaimed:

"They are sending a squadron to Russia! Michel has already signed up!"

Louis did not understand—who was sending whom? André explained:

"Our representatives have reached an agreement with Moscow. It's simply splendid. There's real war over there. We can fight the Boches. I was told that they are taking only the best. I am afraid they won't take me. You are all right, you have brought down three...."

"Let's go," said Louis. "They'll take you too. There's nothing for us to do here. I have had a talk with Davis. This intermission is going to

be a long one—right up to the last act. Politics—Conservatives, Communism, they are afraid of something or other, to hell with them!... The main thing now is to fight the Boches."

They went to sign up. Louis bought an evening paper and they eagerly read the report of the special correspondent in Stockholm: "The German newspapers are writing about the fanaticism displayed by the Russians in Stalingrad. According to these newspapers fierce fighting is continuing in that city. The Russians, in crossing the Volga, are being wiped out by artillery and 'Stukas'..."

Louis said:

"Just before the war a Bolshevik visited my father. An engineer, I think he was. They had an argument about whether the Russians would fight. He said that if they had to fight, they would fight so that it would be terrible to think about it. And it's true, isn't it? They are fighting so that not only the Boches, but even Davis' father-in-law is terrified.... When is the squadron leaving, do you know? I hope it's soon—in time to get to Stalingrad..."

* 8 *

At one time Sergei had looked enviously at photographs of the bridges of New York—that's the kind I'd like to build!... Now he recalled the lines of Mayakovsky.

*If this old world comes to its end—
And chaos reduces this planet to dust,
Only this hump-backed bridge will stand
Towering above the debris of ruin.*

This one is not hump-backed, it's flat, and built of logs. But all the rest fits in: end of the world, chaos and ruin.... Brooklyn Bridge was probably easier to build than this one.... The Germans drop bombs, and bombard it with artillery and six-barrelled mortars. At night the Volga seethes like a cauldron; on its bank the city is burning. Men are dying, and this is as natural as the fact that other men still live, eat porridge, swear, dress wounds, smoke, and write letters. What is this—the agony of death, indifference, or the reverse side of the battle, the daily incidents of war?

It is said that man is distinguished from animals by the ability to laugh. But a merry laugh is amazing here where it seems as though it is possible only to scream. And yet Zonin laughed infectiously. It was Sergei who made him laugh.

"Do you know, the French can't understand how it is possible to eat porridge. One Frenchman said: 'Only cattle eat that stuff in our country.' There was a messenger in our Embassy in Paris who heard

this. He felt offended and retorted: 'But you eat frogs, and in our country even cattle would not eat them.'..."

"Do they really eat frogs?" enquired Zonin incredulously.

"Of course. I have eaten them. They are nice. I like porridge, but I wouldn't refuse some frogs..."

"If you are killed in the daytime—it's a straight hit, but if you are killed at night—it's a pure accident," said Rashevsky (he liked to philosophize). At night the Germans fire at random. The men have grown accustomed to it, they eat and reminisce:

"There's nothing I like better than dumplings. With vinegar. Swallow two hundred grams of vodka..."

"Why be so modest? Say half a litre..."

"I am awfully fond of meat jelly..."

"There's nothing like chowder, though. You catch a sturgeon and..."

"There's lots of fish where I come from. There's the river Kostromka and the lake. We have such floods in the spring that you can't get out of your house, but everybody has a boat..."

"We used to go rowing on the Volkhov, with an accordion, we sang songs... On the other side there is a pine wood, there used to be a Young Pioneer Camp there. There was a girl who came with us, she sang 'Beloved City'..."

"Where I come from there is a little river, Batbakh it's called, which means marsh in Russian. There was a big marsh there, and people said it was impossible to live there. But there is a big collective farm there now, they grow tomatoes, melons..."

"It would be nice to have a peep at them, if only with one eye!..."

"Daydreaming, eh?..."

The dreams are cut short, and the life of Kustodiev from Siberia is cut short too. Sergeant Katzel is severely wounded. Two orderlies carry him away. There is a rattle in his throat (it sounds as if the boards are creaking). But the bridge remains intact...

Zonin asks Sergei:

"What do you intend to do when the war's over?"

"I don't know. I have no idea."

"But I know. I will sleep for three days and nights at a stretch. I'll put my wife on sentry duty outside the bedroom door and she will say 'he's resting,' as if I were a general."

Sergei did not think about the future, he rarely recalled the past. and when he did, those recollections were a torment to him, as if he were looking down into an abyss—it made him feel giddy. He could not for the life of him connect the past with the war. Other men mentally lived with their wives and children, were conscious of their everyday lives, as if there were no rupture, they were merely on a journey. Zonin was a theatre-goer—even now he was keenly interested to hear what new plays

were being presented in Moscow. Yesterday Sergeant Katzel was wounded, but just before that he was going round telling everybody that his Sonya had got top marks at school, and that Monichka was already cutting his teeth. Sergei asked himself in horror: "What's the matter with me? I seem to have turned to stone. . . . I try to recall Valya's face, but I can't." Suddenly she seemed to be at his side, walking with him, smiling, and the vision became unbearable, because she was in another life. One day he recalled an evening he had spent with Mado and he could not believe that it had been he, Sergei, Captain of Engineers—it seemed to him that he had read about it in a book, which he could neither retain in his memory nor forget. He had never been able to live on several planes at once, to give himself up to more than one passion. Nina Georgiyevna used to say: "Why don't you go the theatre sometimes? You sit over your books like one possessed." . . . He had not written Valya for three weeks. She may think that he has ceased to love her, but he simply could not utter the word "Valya"—it was so painful and so remote! His head felt empty, he could think of only what was absolutely essential, and yet all the time he was painfully thinking of something. Perhaps it was about the past, and about the future. Their separation, perhaps? No, something bigger than the separation—it was about the war. . . .

The riverbank was crowded and noisy. They were unloading anti-tank guns, cases of mortar shells, rifle ammunition, canned food; they were hauling bales, rope, rucks and the mail. Wounded were being carried on stretchers. Steam tugs were puffing on the river. Soldiers marched past—a new division. Some of them—in greatcoats too long for them, seemed to be mere boys; they marched with a springy step and shouted; others stepped out cautiously as if testing the ground with their feet—they were on the right bank, Stalingrad. Here were men from the Urals, from the Volga, from Moscow; here were Kazakhs, a teacher of geography, a team leader from the Thaelmann Collective Farm, a student at the Textile Institute, a cotton grower. For an instant a weary, long-unshaven face appears out of the night. Then there is no face, only footsteps. Tomorrow they will crawl along trenches, grub the soil like moles, push their way into cellars, storm the surviving wall of a small house, rush at tanks with hand grenades, put up wire, lay mines, take aim at a Fritz, or only at his shadow, haul containers with soup under hurricane fire and die—not from old age, not from illness—but from "a straight hit" in the daytime, if Rashevsky is to be believed, and "accidentally" at night. When these are gone others will come. Again it will be night, a barge, Stalingrad. Not a day, not a month, but years. Just as in those lines? "The end of the world." . . . And there will remain the bridge—not over ruin, but over the Volga, over the Volga about which songs were sung, along which smart pleasure boats coursed. Just now the water looks like indelible ink. . . . The Greeks had the Lethe, the river of forgetfulness. There was a ferryman there, Charon, for some

reason he was paid a toll.... If only one could get some sleep, this yawning makes one's jaws ache. They are banging away again.... I hope they don't get the bridge.... We cut logs, sawed planks, nailed them....

What's the date today? The fourteenth, I think. Or the fifteenth. Forty days. I didn't hear the radio today. We are holding on here, the crossing is functioning—that's the main thing. He smiled: Why the main thing?... You sit in a place—and always the main thing is what is in front of you. In Paris, I suppose, they don't even know what Stalingrad is.... But they won't capture it, no matter how hard they try. The men are different now—they stand fast. Is it that they have grown accustomed to it? No, you can't say that they have grown accustomed to it; many of them are new, have only recently arrived, don't understand anything yet, it terrifies them; but still they stand fast. They have learned.... Not they, nor I, all of us together, the people. It looks like pandemonium, you can't make head or tail of it, but now everybody knows that there is a plan. In ten years' time, no doubt, everything will be clear, and in the Military Academies they will analyse every move like a chess game. Perhaps one could even understand now if only one could get a good sleep.... But that's not the point, the main thing is—the crossing. Brooklyn Bridge will vanish before this one does.... Huge motor-driven ships used to run between New York and France, I saw pictures of one in the magazines, the 'Normandie,' I think, a real skyscraper. I don't know whether they are running now.... But if a barge is sunk, there will be a second, and a third. It is more difficult to cross the Volga now than it is to cross the ocean. But we are crossing it...."

"Comrade Captain, numbers two and three are shaky...."

Staff Sergeant Shulyapov was afraid that the stays had been damaged. He jumped into the water.

"Gee, it's cold!..."

We must make haste, day will break soon. Everybody is on the job; and there is something peaceful, soothing in this work, even when mortar shells burst around one—the repetition of familiar motions, the straining of muscles, the cries: "One, once again!"

Sandbanks, the low riverbank, a wrecked barge becomes visible.
—Dawn.

Major Shileiko reports: "Six tanks. We are firing point blank."

Later in the day, the Kazakh who spoke about the Batbakh died—he had been hit by a shell splinter and expired before they could get him to the hospital base. In his delirium he said: "I've caught a cold."...

When dusk fell Sergei went to see Major Shileiko. He had his C.P. in a dugout which the men called the "Cave." The air was so laden with tobacco smoke that it was impossible to see a thing.

"How's things at your end?" the Major enquired.

"All's in order. Have you heard the radio?"

"Yes. Nothing particular. Here they tried a push against Balashkin, captured two houses; but Alyosha has reported that they have recaptured one of them. Did you hear those 'Katyushas' banging away? Byelov laid out two Fritzes today. I told him to bring in a live one, but he couldn't work it, he brought a bottle of rum and a cigarette lighter. Take a seat. The rum is rotten stuff, but it's drinkable. It can serve as medicine—I've caught a cold. . . . Let's put the gramophone on. . . . Hang it! The record is cracked, can you hear it ticking? . . ."

The Major listened to Leshchenko for the hundredth time with his head cocked to one side, and for the hundredth time he enquired:

"Why is he so mournful?"

Sergei answered:

"He hasn't been at the crossing, that's why. . . ."

The warmth, the rum and Shileiko's garrulous fussiness made him sleepier than ever.

The Germans were determined to smash the crossing. It seemed as though all the iron of the Ruhr, Biscay, Lapland and Lorraine, white hot and molten, was being poured onto this narrow strip of land, onto the dugouts, the trenches, onto these ordinary people who had chests, lungs, aortas, eyeballs, exceedingly fine, frail organs.

Sergei knew that it was his duty to be here, and this killed fear. Once he had occasion to go to the artillerymen on the left bank. It was Paradise—the men were living almost as if they were in Moscow: drinking tea, glasses in metal holders, sleeping undressed. Suddenly some dive bombers came over. Sergei was terrified: whatever made him come here? . . . At the crossing he had work to do, that was why he was not afraid. . . .

The sappers lost four men. A shell splinter hit Sergei in the arm. Surgeon Levin wanted to send him to the left bank. Sergei refused to go: no time for that.

"If you neglect it, it won't heal properly. . . ."

"It doesn't matter, they'll straighten it later on. Only don't bawl at me. I know it's part of your duty. I knew a surgeon in Moscow, the kindest of men, but he used to shout so loud that the windows rattled. In our division we had a surgeon named Nikitin, he used to shout too. . . ."

Levin expressed surprise:

"I never shout. I am a surgeon—my business is to cut. The patients shout, but I am not supposed to. The neuropathologists are the ones that shout." He paused for a moment and then said: "My son was killed the day before yesterday, at the Tractor Plant, he was in a J. P. mortar unit. He was nineteen, wrote poetry: 'Deep art thou, like grief, not a sea art thou, but a river.' . . . Silly, but it moves me somehow. . . ."

"Not silly at all. I can understand it. . . . I'll be going. I think they are banging away at the crossing again. . . ."

His arm hurt. He tried not to wince. Zonin said: "There's a letter for you." Sergei looked—it was from Valya—he was glad, and for some reason frightened. No, I can't, I'll read it later. . . .

Every now and again the black river was lit up by flares and rockets and it assumed brick-red, dark violet colours.

"Two rafts must be changed."

The ordinary, everyday work proceeded.

* 9 *

Berty recognized Mado's handwriting at once and hurriedly tore open the envelope. Mado wrote: "I must see you. I have gone through and thought over a lot since that time. I don't want to meet anybody. Be at 'la Belle Hôtesse' at 7 p.m. on Friday, the place we visited last summer. Don't tell Father anything. M."

He smiled: now that some dude had thrown her up she remembered her husband. But instead of being frank she is highfaluting—"thought over." . . . Like her father. The same passion for deep romance—rendezvous at night in the country, as if he were a Lycéen. . . . He threw the letter on the floor and then picked it up again. I will be a fool if I go. . . .

He had not seen Mado since the day she had said: "I am going away. I cannot do otherwise." He had not told anybody that his wife had left him; he said: "She is in the Southern Zone." Only in Lancier's presence did he burst out once: "You can be proud of the upbringing you gave your daughter, she is behaving like a streetwalker." . . . Lancier had flared up: "How dare you speak like that about Mado? What right have you to insult the memory of poor Marceline? You think you can do anything you please now, don't you? I am a Frenchman, Monsieur Berty, an ordinary, unhappy Frenchman, whereas you—are Schirke's right-hand man." . . . On the previous day Lancier had requested Berty to use his good offices with the Germans to get a supply of coal for Roche aîné. Berty shrugged his shoulders: Lancier dotes on his daughter; and besides, he is a fool, it is no use arguing with men like that.

Where has she been all this time? Almost a year. . . . A hysterical woman—any adventurer could seduce her. I wouldn't be surprised if she has been living with a Gestapo man who has a horsewhip and a volume of Nietzsche on his bedroom table. She may have been infatuated with a terrorist admirer of de Gaulle—playing at conspiracies, English money, cocaine. But perhaps something simpler—a jockey, a commercial traveller, or a petty cardsharp. . . .

Obviously, she will try to play a comedy again, torment me with her fantasies—a wife, and yet not a wife. But that won't work any more! One thing or another. . . . So I am prepared to forgive her everything? Disgusting! It's like a disease—inside you. Something unclean, makes you lose all self-respect.

Cleanliness was a craze with Berty, he would wash his hands ten times a day, no matter where he was, take a bath every morning and night, and shave twice a day. He stepped up to the mirror, it seemed to him that he had not shaved properly. I have aged—my temples are quite white, bags under the eyes.... Morillot is right—I must take a rest. But if I stop working for only one day I shall collapse....

Not long before that Morillot had said to Berty: "I am afraid Hitler will survive you. True, he is having trouble again, but he asserts that it is a trifle—a few Russians sticking tight in Stalingrad. Well, we'll wait and see. As far as your trouble is concerned, however, I can define it exactly: pressure, twenty-three."

Berty did not tell the doctor the nature of his "trouble." Morillot is a chatterbox and a weathercock; probably he has connections with de Gaulleists. It was not only Mado. He had to wage war against invisible enemies. He himself thought it funny now that he had tried to be neutral last summer. As if you could remain neutral in a war like this! He had not gone begging the Germans for sops, his main concern had been France, he had not started this war—it was the Communists.

Why had he tried to get the German control removed? He had merely made himself ridiculous. Discipline at his factories is excellent: his workers are afraid they may be sent to Germany; they no longer go to the lavatory to have a smoke, and they no longer stand about talking to each other. But the Germans are right: output is declining. It began in March: one day there is a bolt in the clutch, another day there is a short circuit, or a nut missing, or there is sand in the oil feeder. The compressor was damaged. Berty offered a reward for the apprehension of the culprits. Dormoy came and said that Olivier had damaged the machine. Berty reported this to the police. Olivier was beaten almost to death. But several days later they telephoned from the German Kommandatur to say that Olivier was innocent, that he was an honest man, a member of the P.P.F. and that Doriot had stood guarantee for him. Berty summoned Dormoy, but the latter had vanished.

As far back as July Schirke had said: "The chiefs are talking about dismantling your plant. It can't be helped—your workers are either lazy or contaminated. But your equipment is splendid, one can see at once that you are an innovator."

The second of August was a black day for Berty. He racked his brains to find out how those bandits had managed to get to the transformer. Was it Barry? But Barry has been working at the plant for eighteen years, is devoted to Berty and hates the Communists. The Germans kept demanding: who blew up the transformer. Berty pointed to Gilbert. True, he had no evidence that Gilbert was implicated in the matter, but in nineteen thirty-six Gilbert had incited the other workers. had drawn up demands.... That sort doesn't change. Later the Germans reported that Gilbert had denied everything: the usual practice. They

shot him. After that an unknown person shot the chief engineer Lampierre. Although the murder had not occurred in the factory premises, Berty himself invited the Gestapo to investigate the matter: "Perhaps you will have better luck than I."... He realized that he was capitulating, but it could not be helped—another month, and the Germans would commence dismantling operations. After the Gestapo men came German engineers; they occupied a room next to Berty's office.

About two weeks ago Schirke came and talked about the victories in the East.

"Grozny, and then Baku."

"What about Stalingrad?"

"We are destroying the last points of resistance. We have captured tremendous trophies...."

Berty detected a note of suppressed anxiety in Schirke's voice.

"These victories are not doing you any good. You looked more cheerful in the winter, after the retreat...."

Schirke began to talk about the necessity of increasing output:

"The Battle of Stalingrad has consumed an enormous amount of materiel. We need motors.... I am protecting you as much as I can, but the chiefs pay no attention to personal appraisals...."

Several times Berty had found Communist leaflets on his desk. The only people who had access to his office were Yvonne, and the old watchman Delmas. It was difficult to suspect them. Yvonne was an efficient secretary, but a fool; all she was interested in, was sentimental films and hairdressing. Delmas was religious—went to church every Sunday.

Again Berty found a leaflet on his desk: "List No. 1 of traitors sentenced by the People's Tribunal of the Franc-Tireurs and Partisans." He smiled: Mere bluff!... Let's see whom they've got it in for particularly.... Of course, Laval, Déat, Doriot, Darlan, that's natural. Next come the small fry—"Guitry, actor; Drieux-la-Rochelle, author; Abel Bonnard, cabinet minister; Céline, author; Joseph Berty, factory owner."... He did not read any further, he crumpled the list and threw it into the wastepaper basket. It was only in the evening that he remembered the list again and pondered. He felt neither fear nor anger, the leaflet actually calmed him: "Now I can take the gloves off. Traitors—they have sold themselves, some to the Russians, some to the Anglo-Saxons, what do they care about France? I am fighting for France, I, Joseph Berty, factory owner! I have tried to be humane, I did not want to aggravate them, I pitied them. And this is how they reward me...."

He decided to send the Germans a list of those who had formed the "strike committee" in nineteen thirty-six. Thirty-two names; of these, fourteen were still working in his factories. He called Yvonne to take down the names. He looked at her—what a coiffure! Still, she was the

only one who had access to the office besides the old man. Perhaps both. . . . The Communists often resorted to the services of fools like that. He dismissed Yvonne and wrote down the names of the fourteen suspects himself: one engineer, four foremen, the rest ordinary workers. His handwriting was small, but very distinct, almost like print. He laid his pen aside and pondered. Who could have got into the office? Let the Germans interrogate. . . . He took up the pen again and added to the list: No. 15. Thomas, Yvonne, typist. No. 16. Delmas, Jean, watchman."

Lately Berty had been suffering from insomnia. Now, for the first time, he fell asleep without taking a sleeping draught. He felt greatly relieved: "I have done everything, nobody can reproach me now. . . ."

Berty made no enquiries about the course of the investigation. All he noticed was that the acts of sabotage and the appearance of leaflets on his desk had ceased. Later one of the German engineers told him: "Not one of them confessed. They have been liquidated. I was told that your secretary behaved like a fury, she bit the Major. The old watchman died while under interrogation." . . .

Berty had completely recovered his composure. Now Mado's letter upset him again; it opened the old wound. He was fighting staunchly against hidden assassins; why was he impotent in face of this madcap? A foolish passion, the whim of an ageing man! If he wanted to, he could have any beauty he liked in his bed. Why did he want Mado?

On Friday morning Berty firmly resolved not to go. If I go, I shall lose all self-respect. He calmly ate his breakfast and later had a long interview with the Germans about a new model of a staff car. Late in the afternoon he went home, took a bath, shaved, and looking at the clock he smiled: half past six—she is now on the way to Jouarre, or perhaps she is already there, glancing at her watch, waiting. . . . She can wait as long as she likes. . . . In an hour's time he will go to dinner—with little René. . . .

But just after seven he ran out of the house, jumped into his car and, his mind a blank, drove at top speed to Jouarre. Another thirty kilometres to go. She will probably not wait, she'll go away. . . . Several times he was stopped by Germans, he pointed to his windshield—he had a permit, but he looked so nervous that one simplehearted private called his Non-Com: Perhaps this man is a terrorist? . . .

"La Belle Hôtesse" was a small hotel which, before the war, was frequented by loving couples, anglers and gourmets who were fond of dark-lipped Madame Lagrange's cooking. Few people visited the place now. Berty looked into the vacant, dimly lit dining room. A lean tomcat wandered between the tables which were covered with soiled paper tablecloths. He did not see Mado at first; she was sitting in the corner. He glanced at her and realized at once that nothing had changed, neither she, nor her power over him. She looked paler than usual; she wore a raincoat, and a blue silk kerchief covered her head. Berty mumbled:

"Forgive me for keeping you waiting. I was busy..."

"It doesn't matter, I have plenty of time."

Both sat silent. Berty went up to Madame Lagrange, who was sitting in her cash office.

"I have not seen you for a long time, Monsieur Berty."

"No. I am so busy. No time for trips to the country now..."

"How is Madame Berty?" (Madame Lagrange had not recognized Mado, whom she had seen only once, and thinking that Berty was meeting his mistress, she spoke in a whisper.)

"She is quite well, thanks. She is in the Southern Zone... I am living a bachelor's life now. Won't you prepare something for us?"

"Certainly, Monsieur Berty. Times have changed, but I can always find something for you. I remember you were fond of omelette and truffles. I'll have everything ready in half an hour. Do you intend to spend the night here?"

"I don't know. I'll tell you after dinner..."

Returning to Mado he said:

"Dinner will be ready in half an hour. We can take a stroll if you have no objection. It is not very convenient to talk here—Madame Lagrange is far too curious. You would have done better to have come home..."

They went out. The hotel stood on the highroad: from it a narrow path led to the river. It was a moonlit night, very clear, with that resonant quietness that occurs only in the late autumn. The bare trees on the background of the greenish sky looked as though they had been painted with a brush. Berty was nervous. He lit a cigarette and at once threw it away; he was eager to hear what Mado would say.

"Aren't you cold?" he asked. "The nights are chilly already."

"No."

"I feel cold, though."

He raised his coat collar. They reached the river and stopped. At last Berty burst out:

"What have you gone through during this period—the love of a stableman, or the unfaithfulness of a cardsharp?"

"A great deal..."

It seemed to him that she was fumbling for her handkerchief and could not find it. She was probably crying. He had stood on ceremony with her much too long!

"Among this great deal, the execution of the sixteen," said Mado.

Before he could realize the significance of those words he fell prone to the ground. The shot was heard far away, and Madame Lagrange, while laying the table, sighed and said: "Those Germans must be in the village again, drunk as usual!..."

Mado looked down and recalled that first night—Berty asleep, the window, dawn, her vow to distant Sergei. Then she jumped into a boat,

rowed to the other bank and strode quickly down the path through the bushes. Soon she saw Gérard.

"Why so long? I was getting anxious."

"He came late."

"Well? . . ."

She nodded. They walked on further in silence and turned down another path.

"Another two kilometres. Are you tired?"

"No. . . . In fact, I am very tired, but it doesn't matter. . . ."

Gérard kicked at the door for a long time.

"She's deaf. . . ."

At last the door was opened. A little, grey-haired old woman fussily blew up the embers in the grate and put the kettle on. Gérard said to Mado:

"Her grandson used to live with her here. He is a prisoner of war. It's safe here. . . ."

He shouted into the woman's ear:

"Nobody will come here, will they?"

She did not hear. She said with a sigh:

"Hasn't written since Easter. . . ."

Mado sat near the fire in her raincoat. She was feverish. Gérard saw tears in her eyes.

"Are you sorry for him? . . ."

"No, not for him. For myself, for you, for Luc, for this old woman. . . . It could have been different, couldn't it? But what's the use of talking. . . . Luc must be getting anxious. . . ."

"He will know in the morning. You go and lie down. You are very tired. You look awful. . . ."

* 10 *

In the spring Lancier was almost at the point of death. After his tragic conversation with Berty he took to his bed and could not get up again; at night he had an attack of vomiting, as he had that day before the war when he learned where Roy's money had come from. Morillot sounded him for a long time and at last said: "Nervous exhaustion, cher ami. Not dangerous, but unpleasant. You must find some diversion. Why have you abandoned your collections?" Lancier smiled a wan smile: "Nothing interests me now. You can't imagine what I have come to—I don't even notice what I am eating, or what the weather is like." . . .

Fate took pity on him. Widow Amon had no children, and her heart still contained a stock of unexpended tenderness. Lancier met her at a charity concert organized for the benefit of the orphans of deceased members of the Fire Brigade—Marthe Amon's husband had been the Chief of the Fire Brigade; he died from pneumonia in the winter of

the war, but Marthe held that he had died like a soldier—on the battlefield. She was not good-looking, but she captured Lancier's heart with her tenderness and femininity. She concealed her age from him, and only when Lancier proposed to her did she burst into tears and say: "Maurice, I am forty-four."...

Lancier asked himself whether he was not being unfaithful to the memory of Marceline. He knew that he could never love Marthe as he had loved his late wife. But he was so unhappy, so lonely!... Marceline would have been the first to say: "You cannot go on living in such desolation."... When he mentioned Marceline to Marthe the latter said: "You have known real happiness, Maurice. You had an uncommon wife, I can feel that by the way you talk about her.... We have both been bereaved by the war. We are two pieces of wreckage tossed in a stormy sea.... And we are living in an awful time...." Lancier liked the way Marthe reasoned about the events of the day: she disliked the Germans, but she realized that one had to put up with them. She was a real honest Frenchwoman! She could not compare with Marceline, of course, she lacked her refinement and lofty mind. Nivelles would have said that she was "bourgeois." But if all of us were bourgeois like her, perhaps we would not have lost the war.

Before he definitely proposed to Marthe he spoke to her about his children. He told her the whole truth:

"Louis is very brave and reckless. I don't know whom he takes after. He went to England. I am afraid he has been killed. He is not the sort to hang around doing nothing.... Marceline loved him very much. But Mado is nearer to my heart.... Like me, she hates politics. Everybody said that she would turn out to be a good painter. I was so happy when she fell in love with Bertie. But he is an enigma, a mixture of high ideals and diabolical logic. He is capable of saving and also of ruining a man. I don't know what happened between them. Perhaps he offended her in some way, found himself a mistress, but whatever the reason, she left him.... He had the insolence to say the most awful things about her.... That is unforgivable, although I can understand how much he is suffering...."

Lancier saw that Marthe was moved to tears; he said:

"My dear, be my wife. Our union will be stronger than that. Both of us are beyond the age when danger has its attractions. We are seeking repose amidst the present pandemonium, we will be a help to each other...."

Marthe embraced him and, blushing like a girl, whispered:

"On New Year's Eve my sister said to me: 'You will find happiness.' I did not believe her.... With you... with thee I have found it...."

The wedding was a very quiet one. The only guests Lancier invited were Marthe's sister and his own intimate friends. He spoke to each of them beforehand and explained: "The memory of Marceline is sacred

both for me and Marthe." All of them approved of his decision to marry again. Morillot was the only one who dared to jest about it, and in very bad taste. He said: "Why are you apologizing, Maurice? You are fifty-seven, quite a tolerable age. And the Germans have trained us to put up with even worse ersatzes."...

Lancier had succeeded in bringing about a reconciliation between Sembat and Nivelles as far back as the previous summer. He was extremely apprehensive that they would quarrel again and he pleaded for a long time with each of them: "I beg of you, forget politics for a day. For me this is perhaps the only joyous moment amidst the present horrors."...

The dinner passed off well. Sembat was in a melancholy mood and kept silent—he was thinking of Mado; time had not assuaged the bitterness of his unrequited love. Nivelles was in a rarely affable mood, agreed with what everybody said and recalled only what could unite them all—the dinners at Corbeille before the war. Marthe behaved very modestly and kept on saying to the guests: "Why are you eating so little?..." Lancier beamed as he poured out the champagne. Dumas became tipsy. Suddenly he called out:

"I propose that we drink to the health of Léo Alpert. I met him recently, he was wearing a yellow star on his breast. Let's drink to Léo Alpert's star!"

He clinked glasses with everybody. Nivelles bit his lip, nevertheless, he proffered his glass.

"Not with you, Monsieur Nivelles, one should have some sense of decency. . . ."

Sembat, unable to restrain himself, applauded.

Nivelles answered quietly:

"You are drunk. . . . I don't want to mar the solemnity of this family gathering."

Taking leave of Lancier and Marthe, he went away. Lancier said to Dumas reproachfully: "Why did you have to start?"... But Dumas would not listen to reason: "It was they who started. Do you think I am going to clink glasses with the likes of them?" He went away and took Morillot with him. When Sembat took his leave he embraced Lancier and enquired in a whisper:

"Where's Mado?"

"Do you think I know? She has parted from Berty. . . . Perhaps she is where Louis is. It is impossible to make head or tail of anything, everything is so mixed up. . . ."

When the guests had gone Marthe said to Lancier:

"What a pity they quarreled. The professor is right—a respectable man ought not to be tormented only because he is a Jew. Poor Charles had some Jews under him, but he never drew any distinctions. . . . There

is one thing I don't understand though—why was the professor so rude to Monsieur Nivelles?”

“You will never understand that, it's politics. Nivelles is of the opinion that we must collaborate with the Germans.”

“What's wrong with that? Since they are here we must collaborate with them. As if it depended on us!... Everybody is collaborating with them, although I don't suppose anybody has any love for them. But it is silly to shout about it as the professor does. One can get into serious trouble....”

Lancier thought to himself: “She reasons like I do. Like the Marshal. Like all Frenchmen. Dumas is always too blunt. And Nivelles overdoes things....”

Lancier was now keenly interested in matters that he had formerly thought dull. On meeting Morillot the first thing he asked was: “How's it going in Stalingrad?...” He was aware that somewhere, far away, a gigantic battle was raging, on the issue of which much depended, perhaps even the fate of Roche aîné. He fulfilled contracts for the Germans, quite sincerely denounced the terrorists, was indignant with the English for bombing Havre and Rouen; nevertheless, he was glad that the Germans were in trouble. The Russians will perish, of course. They are fanatics, suicides, but evidently the Germans were not finding it easy.... The raid on Dieppe was a slight reconnaissance, only Dumas could have believed that it was a real landing. Why should they hurry? The Russians were still fighting.... In two or three years' time the Allies may really make a landing. Whatever the German newspaper may say, America is a force....

He forgot about the storm of war when he breakfasted alone with Marthe. “How strange,” he said to himself, “that I should have found simple happiness amidst such a calamity....”

One morning, while at breakfast, he opened his newspaper and uttered a cry of amazement: his son-in-law gazed at him from its columns. Lancier read that Bertie had been killed near Jouarre. The murder was evidently a crime of jealousy, for the victim's wallet and watch had not been stolen. Half an hour before the crime was committed the landlady of “la Belle Hôtesse” had seen the murdered man with a tall, good-looking young woman who wore a grey macintosh....

“I am sorry for him. I am not vindictive, but I'll tell you the truth. Marthe, he deserved it.... He had no right to talk about a woman the way he did.... He must have had a dozen mistresses. This is the result.”

Lancier read further: “The police are enquiring into Monsieur Bertie's private life and into the circumstances under which Madame Bertie left Paris for the South in January.”... He sat silent for a long time and then suddenly stepped hurriedly up to Marthe and whispered:

“What if Mado killed him? How awful!...”

"Good heavens, Maurice! . . . Nobody would even suspect her. . . . How can you say such a thing? . . ."

"You don't know Mado. She takes after poor Marceline. . . . When women like that are in love they are capable of anything. And she was madly in love with him, she went away without saying a word to me. . . ."

He soon calmed down however:

"Morillot is right—it's my nerves; I imagine things. . . . Do you know what? I'll go to the funeral, even though he did insult me. I must order a wreath, I think chrysanthemums will be the most suitable. . . ."

At the funeral Lancier wept: he remembered how Berty had accompanied him and Mado at Marceline's funeral. "After all, I loved Joseph very much. . . . It is good that he has such a fine funeral. He had many political enemies, but nobody can deny that he was a big man. There are wreaths from the Minister, from his workers, from the Manufacturers' Association, and from Schirke. . . . The Germans can be tactful—the military men have come in mufti. . . ."

Lancier had already forgotten about his late son-in-law when the newspaper brought him another sensation: "The police have ascertained that the woman who killed Monsieur Joseph Berty, belongs to a gang that calls itself 'Franc-Tireurs and Partisans.' The German authorities whom our reporter interviewed emphasized that while the vast majority of the French people are maintaining excellent relations with the occupational authorities, a handful of criminals, among whom Jews and aliens occupy a prominent place, are committing terroristic acts not only against German servicemen, but also against representative Frenchmen. A big reward has been offered for the apprehension of the unknown miscreant, whose description has been published in the press on several occasions."

Lancier was astounded. "After all, this is unheard of! The Communists have gone mad! One could disagree with Berty, I myself got a little heated and said he was Schirke's right-hand man, but it is one thing to have an argument, but to kill one of the most honest of men! I had a suspicion that men like Lejean would sink to that sort of thing. . . . But why are the Germans offering a big reward? . . . It shows that they must have needed Berty very much. And yet Mado left him. . . . They may pick on me and ask me why my daughter left such a splendid man. How can I explain to these roughnecks that the heart has its rights, that Mado takes after Marceline? . . . They may drag me into this, the more so that the shadow of unfortunate Alpert lies over Roche aîné. Why did I ever have any connections with him? I have done many reckless things in the course of my life and now I have to pay for them in my old age. . . ."

"Why aren't you eating anything?" enquired Marthe with great concern.

Lancier lost his temper and threw his serviette down:

"All you think about is eat! You don't realize what danger is threatening me..."

He said no more. She was not Marceline... He had no one to go to to seek advice. Nivelles would say: "It is evident that you side with the Jews and terrorists, in your house they drink to the health of Alpert." And Dumas would say: "It's a good thing they killed him..." Everybody has lost the last shreds of common sense, at some moments one can hardly believe that this is France...

When a German car stopped at a little distance from Corbeille, Lancier, who was standing at the window, whispered:

"Marthe!..."

She rushed to his side.

"What's the matter?"

The German car went on further and Lancier answered:

"Nothing... You must have imagined I called..."

He racked his brains in the endeavour to find a way out of his predicament; at last he decided to write an obituary article about Berty. He had not written anything except letters for a long time, and the prospect of writing this article was a torture to him; but once he started on it, he was carried away with the task. He was particularly pleased with the last lines:

"For me he was not only a son-in-law and friend, but also a great citizen. Let the criminal who raised her hand against this splendid man meet with universal contempt! Perhaps she dreamed of becoming as famous as Charlotte Corday! It would be more correct, however, to compare her with Medea into whose mouth Ovid put the words: 'I see good, but I do evil.' She saw the France of the Marshal, she saw valiant Joseph Berty, but, instigated by foreigners, she committed an evil deed."

Lancier read his composition to Marthe.

"It is very nicely written, but to whom will you send it? Did he leave any relatives?"

"I will send it to the press."

"What for? Better keep out of it... You may put their backs up against you..."

Lancier shouted:

"Nobody will dare prohibit a Frenchman from mourning the death of a fellow Frenchman! And besides, he was my son-in-law..."

He sent the article to the press. In the evening he telephoned Morillot and asked him to come at once.

When the doctor wanted to examine him he said:

"I asked you to come for something else, only I beg of you, don't laugh, it is a matter of life or death to me. I have written an obituary article about Berty. I did not write what I think, but what could I do? The Germans thought a lot of him and Mado left him. I am in a precarious position, Roy may bring up Alpert any minute. I had to do it.

You, probably, have acquaintances in the other camp, you listen in to London, tell them that I was obliged. . . .”

Morillot laughed derisively:

“The fact that I listen to London does not mean that London listens to me. Whom do you want me to tell? Mado? But Mado has vanished. . . .”

“You are laughing at me again?”

“It’s your nerves. . . . Fresh air, exercise.”

“Have you heard the radio? What’s new? How’s it going at Stalingrad?”

“No change. That’s bad for the Germans. Things like that are either settled at one stroke, or are settled by no means in the way that had been planned. . . .”

This statement that things were going bad for the Germans made Lancier feel uneasy: I am bound up with them now. And Morillot is only glad of the opportunity to torment a man. He snatched up the *Paris Soir* and exclaimed in a squeaky voice:

“Nonsense! Stalingrad has been captured. There, read it for yourself. I can’t understand why you listen to all this nonsense.” . . .

“Not so loud, mon cher! . . . You have written, you have shouted, but it’s all due to the vegetative system. . . .”

* 11 *

He had to spend his nights in the queerest of places. Luc would laugh and say: “It’s a pity we haven’t a Balzac in the Resistance—a hundred complete novels.” . . . This night he was staying at the house of a taxidermist. On all sides curious eyes were staring at him: a panther crouched, ready to spring, a bear cub smiled affably, an owl philosophized, and a spitz, formerly the pet of Madame Dufy (she had had him stuffed, but had not taken him away because of the war) guarded Luc, for he had to guard somebody.

When Mado came the surroundings made her feel nervous. Luc smiled:

“Don’t be afraid, France, they don’t bite. If there were a stuffed Gestapo man here, it would be something to be frightened of. . . .”

Like the others, Luc now called Mado—France. And she had also forgotten that Luc had ever been engineer Lejean. It would soon be a year that she had been working in Luc’s group. The assassination of Berty had been only one episode in a long campaign: the task was to disrupt war production. Among the sixteen who had been executed as a result of the information laid against them by Berty, there were five comrades who had worked with Luc. All operations had to be suspended for several weeks. Now the lull was over. Jules and Nico were fine lads. And the main thing—Berty was dead.

"Have you seen the newspapers? They have read our leaflet. They have stopped talking about jealousy. It created a tremendous impression—they realize that we are a force. You must go away, France. The landlady of the hotel saw you. They will put everybody on your track. Jacques will take you away tomorrow."

"Where to?"

"To the other Zone. Perhaps you will see Josette, or Paul."

She felt sad: she would have to leave Paris. All her life had been bound up with this city: her childhood, Sergei, her loneliness, the underground. . . . But she was able to exercise self-control now, and Luc failed to notice anything.

"How are things over there?"

He guessed what she meant by the tone in which she said "over there."

"They are holding on. Isn't it amazing? Just imagine—the flower of the German army, Italians, Rumanians, probably a quarter of a million, no less, all the factories in Europe. . . . And on a tiny plot of ground—Soviet men. . . . This will be remembered forever. Not the vast expanse of Russia, but a tiny strip of land. . . . Two months! Yesterday the Germans announced over the radio: 'A frightful dance of death.' Yes, they have danced themselves out. This morning, in the street, I heard two Frenchmen, not workers, government officials, or perhaps rentiers, greet each other, and next thing one of them said: 'Stalingrad is still holding out, eh!' To think that even people of that kind are beginning to understand! The whole world is looking on. . . . Anna says that you can hardly recognize the Germans. There's going to be a big change, you can feel that. . . ."

During the past year Mado and Lejean had been drawn together by ties of genuine friendship. This friendship may have been incomprehensible to those who regarded Lejean as a dry dogmatist who believed that there were only two colours in life—red and black, only two words—"yes" and "no". But Lejean knew all words and all shades, only he was living in an age when one had to live only for one object; for the war had started long before the war, and the bigger a man was, the more urgently he felt the necessity of self-restraint. Perhaps it was because he had known Mado when she was still a wilful girl growing in the hothouse of Corbeille that he understood her even if she spoke little. All her comrades appreciated her as a good, sensible and brave woman. Luc knew something more: what it had cost her; somehow, life had suddenly trampled upon her; having already renounced personal life and the hope of future happiness, she preserved only her dignity. After Bertv had informed against the sixteen, and after the latter's trial and execution, the question came up of punishing the "hanger-on of the Germans" (as her comrades had called him). Luc had added: "It is important to remove him because he is not a hanger-on but an inspirer."

France volunteered to kill Bertie. Luc, remaining alone with Mado, tried to dissuade her: "Don't. We have militant lads who will do the job." Perhaps he was afraid that she would not be able to get away, perhaps it was something else that prompted him: after all, Mado was Bertie's wife. . . . But she insisted: "Why should others risk their lives? It will be easier for me to do it. And I want to do it. He had a secretary, Yvonne, a simple girl who wore her hair in curls, borrowed fashion journals from me, dreamed of meeting Gabin or some other movie star. He dragged even her into it. I assure you, Luc, I will do it. It is my job by right." . . .

Soon they would part. Luc would spend the night here and France would go to Vacher's place where Jacques would find her next day. After that—the South. . . . Just now they were feeling sad. What could have bound people together more than a year like that?

"Do you think it will be different after the war?" asked France. She wanted to peer into the future, to know whether others would see happiness. Milet was shot. Robert will never forget his love. But the young ones, the very young ones—Paul, Luc's son? . . . No, Paul was already in the underground. . . . Mimi, Luc's little daughter, she was now nine years old. . . .

For a long time Lejean sat smoking in silence. The eyes of the owls and lynxes gleamed, and the faithful spitz crouched, ready to pounce upon a likely malefactor.

"Last Tuesday I met an A.S. man. He is an engineer, before the war he belonged to the Croix de Feu. I spoke to him about tommy guns. They have a large stock of arms—the Allies drop them with parachutes. They have got to hide them until G-day. A pity. . . . Perhaps they will give us a couple of dozen. When you began to talk about the future I remembered him. We met like friends. I know, he may be arrested tomorrow, but he will not betray, you could see at once that he is one of the staunch kind. Three years ago, perhaps, when I was arrested and put in gaol, a fellow like that must have exclaimed indignantly: 'Why don't they shoot the Communists? . . .' Who knows what he will be in three years' time? . . . Now they are saying that France must be reformed, that everything is rotten, that the Communists are brave lads. They admire Stalingrad. That engineer said to me: 'In Stalingrad they are fighting also for us.' . . . But what will be later—after victory? An individual may be regenerated. But a whole class? No, such things don't happen! All the time he kept saying 'France'—he has a house, but no family—no people. . . ."

"I was in a house recently, Luc, in Billancourt; the house was bombed and they wanted to give the people other quarters, but they declined. Actually there is no house, only the walls; they live on the ground floor, the windows are boarded up, the rain drips in, it is cold, but one of the women said to me: 'After all, it's our own, our home.' . . .

Sometimes I think about the future and I am frightened. Just now we are living through a storm—the roof has been torn off, the windows have been blown out, people are living as if in the street. They say: ‘After the victory we will build.’... But perhaps they won’t; they’ll patch things up, find a piece of board and cover up the cracks; wretched, dark, but the old home....”

“But do you think men change at one stroke, France? There will be a revolution, if not now, then later. But even after the revolution everything will not change at once, particularly the people. It was the Utopians who believed that everything could be done overnight; for them, the beginning was as remote as the end. Do you know when an ascent is most difficult? Not when you are looking at the pinnacle from below, not at the beginning—but when you are halfway up, when you know exactly every turn. You can come down at a run, but going up, you climb and climb.... It’s a frightful road—boulders, mud, and blood! And yet—it is a road....”

“I am not thinking about myself. But the children.... Your Mimi, will she see it?...”

“I remember, France, when you used to come and play hide and seek with Mimi. Mimi died. In April. Josette does not know. Don’t tell her.... When Josette had to go into hiding, she left Mimi with a friend of hers. The friend was arrested and Mimi was left literally in the street. A forest keeper picked her up later, but it was too late, she was exhausted, and she died.... I told Josette that she is in Switzerland; we thought of sending her to Lausanne at the beginning of the war. Josette has an aunt there. I cannot tell her the truth, she is worn out as it is. Mimi is everything to her, she enquires about her in every letter. I am thinking of her all the time myself.... Yesterday I wrote Josette that I have received news that Mimi has grown a lot....”

He got up and stepped towards Mado. Among the green, amber and orange coloured eyes she saw another pair—human.

“It’s time for you to go, France. It’s a long way to Vacher’s place....”

She embraced him and left the house. The street was blacked out—the first winter fog. Perhaps it was better that way—no Germans, none of that habitual and yet monstrous life that was running its course day after day. Sometimes it seemed to Mado that they were shipwrecked, and that they were clinging to planks with the sea all round them. But that was not so. She had comrades—at this moment they were printing leaflets, blowing up trains, saying nothing when they were tortured. There was Stalingrad. They were supporting a common cause, never had they been so close to one another. And in this common cause each one was alone, enveloped in a thick fog. Who knew that Luc was thinking of Mimi all the time?...

So this was the end of life in Paris? She would see new cities, new people. It was no use guessing, everybody was living a soldier's life now. If I were to meet Sergei now, just round the corner, we would no doubt understand each other. We would not start talking about emotions, we would not argue. I would ask him: "How are things on your side today?..." The day before yesterday Jacques said that in Stalingrad battles are fought for a single house....

Perhaps they will not board up the windows, they will put glass in, build a new house. But Mimi will not be there.

Vacher said in a grating voice: "It's very easy to catch cold in weather like this. I try to go out as little as possible, I am inclined to get rheumatic pains."...

A large number of arrests were made that night. Jacques managed to escape through a garret window. Nic, Sauvage and Robert were arrested. All night long Lejean rolled restlessly in his bed—he was dreaming strange dreams—at one moment Mimi threw a ball; he ran to look for it, but could not find it; at another, wild beasts, with glaring red eyes, ran up to him, sniffed his boots, and raising their long snouts, howled and howled....

* 12 *

On the previous evening Anna had been with an officer who had come from Brest. He told her that the Two Hundred and Eighteenth Rifle Regiment had been suddenly despatched to Russia. Lieutenant Schelling had committed suicide on hearing that he was being sent to capture Stalingrad. The Major mustered the men and told them that Lieutenant Schelling had committed suicide because he had been suffering from an incurable disease. But everybody was aware of the true reason, and as they were being entrained the men said: "We are going to take a cure for an incurable disease."... Anna thought to herself: "I must tell Jacques this, he can write about it for *France d'abord*."... The officer said to her: "I have never seen a German woman like you before, you have real Parisian chic."... As Anna was returning to Gilet that night a drunken Frenchman called after her: "Hurrying to your house, little mouse?"

She was to meet Jacques at ten in the morning. As she approached the house she saw nothing suspicious; she slowly mounted the winding staircase to the seventh floor; she stopped at the door and listened; she thought she heard Jacques speaking to someone. She knocked four times, the agreed signal. When the police grabbed her the thought flashed through her mind: "The mouse has been caught in a trap," and she smiled.

"Wait, you'll be crying soon," said the policeman.

Anna had been expecting this hour much too long to be dismayed by it. Her coolness drove the Gestapo men frantic. At the very beginning of the interrogation, Siller, surprised by her accent, shouted:

"You are lying! You are not an Alsatian, you are a German!"

"I was a German once," answered Anna. "I will be a German again, when I am dead, and when you too will be no more. At present I am French, Russian, Spanish, anything but German."

"This is unheard of," said Siller to the Colonel. "I have never met a witch like that before. She has the face of an angel, love letters in her handbag, and speaks German as well as I do. She is no pawn, she is an important spy."

They interrogated her at night, they almost blinded her, plunged her into ice-cold water, burned her breasts. Losing patience, Siller yelled:

"Do you want to be beheaded?"

"Yes," answered Anna.

She did not declare her identity: perhaps her father was still alive. . . . Sauvage (the Spaniard Jose Gomez), Nic, the Parisian working man, and the student Robert who had drawn Mado into the work, had been caught in the same trap with her. Siller confronted them with each other. Not one of them gave any information. While Anna was being tortured she either remained silent, talked incoherently about how she had fought in Spain, or expressed her hatred for the Nazis; and when she felt that her strength was leaving her she loudly scanned the word: "Sta-lin-grad! Sta-lin-grad!"

At last they left her in peace: the Colonel sent an enquiry to Berlin—should he send the arrested German woman to Germany or let the case take the usual course?

As she gradually came to herself, thoughts about what had occurred (had she been watched, or had she been betrayed? Did Jacques get away?) were mixed up in her mind with recollections of her childhood. It was a kaleidoscope of years and faces. Perhaps it was the fact that all the time she had remembered that she must not disclose her identity because they would torture her father to death that revived the memory of years long passed away: her mother wearing a kerchief and carrying a basket with red currants; her father, who in the middle of his sermons solemnly blew his nose, scattering snuff from his silk handkerchief. . . . From her parents her thoughts passed to her comrades. I didn't manage to get information about tanks, although Jacques had urged me very strongly to do so. What if Jacques has been arrested? All the work rested upon him. . . . He has grown frightfully thin since the summer—ulcer of the stomach, and it is impossible to diet oneself with the life they are living. . . . They had learned Sauvage's real name, they may report it to Spain, he has a family there. He had shown them a photograph—a lovely little boy. . . . And again the little town where she was born hovered before her eyes: the old fountain in the square—a gnome spit-

ting silvery water, two lime trees; a fruit stall—in the summer they sold cherries, plums and gooseberries; the stationery shop where little Anna would gaze for hours through the shop window at the coloured postcards, leather satchels and carved pencil cases. The green hills surrounding the town; on one of those hills there was a pastry shop, and a telescope through which one could see the Rhine, vineyards, the ruins of an ancient castle.

She had climbed that hill with Heinrich. He was very shortsighted: he looked so self-confident, but when he took his glasses off there was a childish expression on his face. He gazed long at the distant river. She was born in the very year that the first world war had started, and she learned about it only from her school books, and from what her parents had told her. Her father would often say: "We lost then, we'll have to fight again." . . . Anxiously she had asked Heinrich: "Will you have to fight too?" He answered: "Of course! Not the French though, the Nazis." . . . She did not understand, but she nodded—what she had feared most was that Heinrich should think that she was a silly girl. She was eighteen. . . . Heinrich took his glasses off and asked suddenly: "Do you like Heine? There is a poem of his about an old story which is ever new. . . . I thought I would go away soon, but I stay here and wonder every day whether I will meet you or not. . . ."

Two months later they were married. They lived a year together. Then the Nazis came. . . . In the square, around the fountain with the gnome, young people sang songs and bawled all night long. Among them were Anna's playmates of her childhood. She did not see them, she was in Hamburg. Heinrich said: "We shall have to go underground." She still understood little of what he said then, but one thing she did understand: her happiness was over.

Although her father was a parson, it had seemed to Anna that he did not believe in God. She told him that one day and he had answered: "The Bible is the book by which we must guide our lives." To him God was the great lawgiver who had died long ago but who had left mankind proper rules of life. Perhaps that was the reason why he had approved of her mother's decision to hide Heinrich, although he was of the opinion that the Communists were inimical to Germany and contemptuously called the Jews "half-believers."

Nineteen thirty-five. . . . Only now do I understand what Heinrich lived through. I thought I understood then, but one must go through it oneself. Now we have met again, like that time when we fell in love. . . .

Anna would often reproach herself: How sentimental I am, like a real German! She was afraid that emotion would hinder her in the fight. Now she was sure of herself; she even gave way to tears, and at that moment she did not think of Heinrich or of her childhood, she did not think of her approaching death, she merely abandoned herself to that great tenderness which she had suppressed within herself all these years.

Suddenly a vision of Spain rose before her eyes: pink and reddish bare hills, the summer heat, the bright yellow river—the Ebro. This was just before the climax; for the last time half-dead Spain tried to rise, to break through the hostile ring. Day and night the fascists bombed the crossing. The men held on, although they knew that there was no hope. Anna remembered how a peasant had come along and had insisted on being taken into the army. Nobody could understand why, having remained at home for two years, he should come along now when the war was lost. But the peasant explained: "In my village the priest bosses the show, and so nobody went to fight. Now they say that the fascists are coming out on top. Let them know that there are men also in my village." . . . He was killed right there, on the Ebro. . . .

When she was in Spain her father wrote to her to say that he was alive and loved his daughter as much as ever, but she had not heard anything of him since then, he may have died, he may have become a Nazi—everybody had gone mad there. . . .

Four of them were tried: Jose Gomez ("Sauvage"), Yves Meunier ("Robert"), Jean Valin ("Nic") and Marie Nielhaus, "a woman who claimed to be a native of Colmar." Before the judges entered the courtroom Nic managed to let his comrades know: "Jacques got away. Good news from outside—Stalingrad is holding on." . . . The matter-of-fact way in which he whispered this calmed Anna. So they were together again. . . . They had rarely talked to each other before: there had been no time for that. Now and again she had reminisced about Spain with Sauvage. He had been touched by the fact that she remembered Spanish words, he would say: "Will I never be there again?..." She had answered: "Of course you will. I too. We'll go to Puerta del Sol, it will be very hot, very noisy and jolly." . . . One day Robert said to her: "I expect nothing for myself. There was Lucie. She was taken." . . . Nic had confessed that he was only nineteen; he had been fond of talking about trifles, related how he had played practical jokes on policemen, how he had caught fish: "a tench—as big as that." . . . They knew little about each other: they were bound together by something bigger than individual joys and sorrows. And so they were together. They knew that nothing had broken them. They looked at the judges sternly and aloofly, like victors.

They listened to the verdict unmoved: they had anticipated it. Nic whispered to Sauvage: "They are trying to look important. I'd like to see them a year from now." . . . As they were led out of the courtroom Robert for a moment found himself by Anna's side. She raised her manacled hands.

"Good-bye, Robert. I can't embrace you. . . ."

"Listen, Anna. . . . I want to tell you as a Frenchman, as a Communist—it's good that you are with us. And Sauvage. And the Russians in Stalingrad. Good-bye, Anna!"

She heard those words in her dark cell, and she heard them later, when they came for her. Those words lit up her last moments. She thought to herself: "We used to say 'international,' but even that one must go through oneself. . . . From the Volga even to me. . . . Father was fond of talking about the Paradise of the Bible: a green, dense garden. But that Paradise is lost, I found another. . . ."

She refused to have her eyes bound, but they bound them nevertheless—the officer thought that she was looking at him with defiance. But she was looking at the rain-swept square, at the tall, gaunt tree, at the Paradise which she had found.

* 13 *

Before the war Christine Staube had done embroidery work at home for an art shop and had looked after her father, a former government official who had been struck by paralysis. She was thirty-six and no longer thought of marriage, although it could not be said that she was ugly. About ten years before she had been courted by a bookkeeper named Zimmer, he took her to the cinema and to the pastry shops. On learning who the claimant to her hand was, her father had raved that she was failing in her duty, that a girl must weigh everything before taking the fatal step, that he could not interfere, he was sick and old, but he would not give her a pfennig. Christine met Zimmer, her eyes swollen with tears, and said: "Gustav, I am ready for anything. I am willing to marry this very minute. . . . But Papa is against it. The house is in his name. I earn good money, but apart from that I haven't got a thing." . . . Gustav answered: "I am not a materialist. I love you even though you have no dowry." . . . Then he hurried away, he had overtime work to do. Christine saw him no more. Her heart became hard and dry, like a cut loaf of bread that remains uneaten. Now and again she wept—when Papa dies I shall remain alone. Sometimes she would indulge in vague dreams—when he dies I will sell the house and marry, one can find a husband even at forty. . . .

At last her father died; but this happened in March nineteen forty-two; it was impossible to sell the house—after an English air raid the railway district became deserted; she had to give up her dream of marrying—even twenty-year-old beauties could find no courtiers; dressing-gowns embroidered with storks or tablecloths with irises no longer found any customers. Christine took a job as a barrack overseer in a camp for women who had been brought from Russia. Herr Kirchhoff explained to her: "These women are not criminals, we keep them locked up only because the habits of the Russians are different from ours. You must be strict but just, remember that the Russians are children." . . .

Christine was not vicious by nature, and when she first slapped blue-eyed Varya's face her conscience smote her: perhaps it was wicked to

do that? But after thinking awhile she calmed down: Herr Kirchhoff said that the Russians are children, and children must be punished; when I pulled a kitten's tail, or broke anything, Papa always slapped me well and hard.... She herself failed to notice that most often she punished the young and attractive girls. Fussner, the camp doctor, said about sixteen-year-old Shurochka: "She's like a portrait by Murillo."... One day Christine searched Shurochka and found two pieces of soap. "Where did you get these from?" Shurochka remained silent. Christine accused her of stealing and slapped her face. They are children! Christine thought that she had grown to love her Russian charges, they were not as bad as the newspapers described them, and besides, good God, how sweetly they sang!...

Starved and overworked, the girls sometimes sang songs in the evening to forget their hard lot for a moment; those songs expressed a longing for home, for mother, for a sweetheart. Christine knew that it was enough for her to enter the barrack for the singing to stop. She stole up to the window like a thief and listened. She saw a vision of herself in a dark, stuffy room—bottles of medicine, faded photographs of her aunts, the sick old man in an armchair, and somewhere, far away, handsome Gustav was embracing another woman surrounded with jasmines.... Christine heaved deep sighs: "My God, how unhappy I am!..."

The best singer among the girls was Galochka. Long ago, her friends of the Pickwick Club used to say: "Come on, laughing girl, sing!" She was happy then, but she used to sing about unhappy love. Here she preferred to sing merry songs. This annoyed Christine: what is the wench so glad about? She has a pleasant voice, but the songs she sings are vulgar, there's nothing elevating about them.... But for all that, Christine listened to those songs, she even tapped her foot as if she were about to dance a shimmy with Gustav.

Galochka had failed to find her Young Communist Leaguers in Kiev. She hoped—when it gets warmer our soldiers will come. But came that frightful summer: the Germans got as far as the Volga. Steshenko met Galochka in the street one day. Looking at her mockingly he said: "Still about? We shall see Valya soon, the Reds won't hold out more than three months."... The city was dumbstricken, Gestapo men and police prowled around, anybody who dropped an incautious word was taken away and was seen no more. Posters were up everywhere calling upon the young people to go to Germany—they would get comfortable lodgings, plenty of food, and fine clothes. In the spring the Germans succeeded in inducing several hundred to go. Ksana, who had been Galochka's tenth form classmate, signed up: "I want to see what a foreign country is like," she said. Galochka tried to dissuade her: "Foreign country? It will be like penal servitude.... Suppose they compel you to make munitions? Your brother is in the army, that means that you will kill him, doesn't it?..." "You are trying to be clever," answered

Ksana. "But I'm going abroad all the same. I'll get myself some new clothes." . . . When the Germans found that few volunteered, they began to resort to coercion. Galochka fell into their clutches.

A Non-Com who could speak a little Russian looked at the weeping women and said: "Germans good. Germans not kill." Galochka burst out laughing and then blurted out: "Oh, Granny, what big teeth you have!" The Non-Com did not understand, but Galochka's laughter annoyed him; he swore and walked away from the car. The girls who were standing around Galochka laughed, Galochka's merry laughter infected them. They did not suspect that this laughter was forced. But Galochka had got it firmly in her mind: we must be jolly now—it will keep our spirits up and make the Germans mad. . . . And so the "laughing girl" was resurrected.

Early in the morning they were led through the town to a factory. It was a small town and very clean. Brass plates gleamed over the barber-shop doors. China washstands and kitchen utensils glistened in shop windows. Children were neatly dressed and did not run, but walked staidly to school. At the entrance to sausage and butcher's shops black and tan pug dogs, tied to hooks especially provided for the purpose, squatted sedately, waiting for their mistresses. In the market place women were selling flowers—the last asters of the season. Galochka recalled the ruins of Kreshchatik, Uncle Lyonya, the people who were hanged. Now she saw baby carriages, plaits tied up with ribbon, toy shops, lawns. . . . How strange that the likes of those should have wives and children, that the wife of a Gestapo man should go to market, buy pears or apples, wipe the nose of her child. . . . Far better if they scratched and bit! . . .

Galochka had learnt German at school; she soon learned to understand Christine's admonitions, the abuse of the foremen at the factory, and the comments of the townspeople as the girls returned to the barracks from work: "How ragged they are! . . . Karl writes that the Russians are worse than niggers. . . . Snub-nosed. . . . Sturdy looking, a good thing they are kept in camp. . . . I would never take one like that into my house. . . . But Frau Jennike has a Russian girl and she is quite satisfied." . . . Then Galochka laughed and said to Varya: "Look at that one—nose, mouth, chin, all crooked, like their alphabet." . . . And Varya laughed too.

They were fed on soup made from mangel wurzels; they were always tormented by hunger. Their work was hard: they had to lug iron ingots and sacks of cement, clean furnaces. In order to bring up the children in her charge properly Christine would punish one of them every day—gave her no dinner, put her on fatigue duty—digging bomb slits after work—or slapped her. The only one she did not punish was Galochka; perhaps it was because she loved her voice—"she is my nightingale" she would say to Dr. Fussner, or perhaps she was afraid—whenever she

punished one of the other girls Galochka would look at her so fiercely that Christine thought to herself: "That nightingale could peck your eyes out...."

Christine gave the women a newspaper the Germans issued in Russian. It was impossible to understand anything from this newspaper: it looked as though the Germans were victorious everywhere, and yet the war went on and on. The strong-minded girls, like Galochka, did not believe a word they read, they were convinced that the Germans would be beaten in the winter, and they would be able to return to their homes; but the weak ones, seeing the peaceful life of this town so far from the war area, the wares displayed in the shop windows, and the smug, well-fed German women, said: no, our men will never be able to beat them!... Galochka would then give rein to her imagination: the Germans were defeated near Rostov, the Allies have landed in France; there is a rumour that Hitler was killed.... Galochka knew that they must not give way to despondency.

At the factory where they worked there were some French prisoners of war. At first the girls kept themselves apart: you couldn't tell what those Frenchmen were thinking, perhaps they too were proud; and besides, even if you did talk to them you couldn't understand their language. The Frenchmen smiled at the girls in a friendly way, spoke to them in German, said they were "kameraden" (they all understood that word) and gave them bread, cheese and chocolate—they received parcels from home.

Galochka became friendly with a young, jolly Frenchman. He told her he was the son of a doctor, and that he was a student of physics. They conversed in a queer jargon that was a mixture of German, Russian and French. They conversed in snatches, and yet they learned a great deal about each other. Galochka could picture Paris as vividly as if she had been there—a huge square, streets radiating from it, tables in the streets at which one could drink coffee, chestnut trees, like those in Kiev; Pierre had just passed his examinations, he and his fellow students were walking down the middle of the street singing and shouting—that was very jolly, it is called "monôme."... And Pierre learned that Kiev was green and hilly, when you looked down on the Dnieper from Vladimir Hill "you could die, it was so beautiful"; Galochka had often gone to the opera, she liked "The Queen of Spades" and "Carmen."... She was pleased to hear that Pierre had read *Pickwick Papers*. The only thing that grieved her was that she could not explain that she was called the laughing girl.... But she did tell Pierre about Valya, Raya and Borya. "There's lots of partisans in our country, they even kill Fritzes in Kiev." Pierre told her that there were partisans in France too, and they were fighting well; but in the beginning there were many traitors, they surrendered Paris and the Maginot Line—he had been taken prisoner together with the rest. He enquired about the Red Army.

and Galochka proudly answered: "It's a splendid army! The Germans haven't captured either Moscow or Leningrad; Kiev will soon be liberated." . . . She repeated what she had read in that leaflet, although after that had come that awful summer—when she looked at Pierre, everything changed and she truly believed that the Russians were advancing. . . . Pierre helped her the best he could, on the quiet gave her bread, sausage and candies. He looked at her in such a way that he made her feel merry—really merry, not pretence, and then she did not laugh, she looked serious, blushed and turned her head away. Sometimes green grass springs up among the refuse and slag in a factory yard. Such was their love in that dark autumn of nineteen forty-two. Not once did they speak about their feelings towards each other, but whatever they spoke about, in the brief, simple words they uttered there was another meaning, which they alone understood.

One day Pierre said to Galochka:

"Roger is working for a German. When everybody had gone he switched on the radio and got on to London. The Germans are getting it in the neck—they can't capture that city of yours. . . ."

"Which one?"

"Stalingrad."

In the evening Galochka said to the girls:

"It's going hard with the Germans. They haven't captured Stalingrad. . . ."

"The newspaper said that they have captured it," retorted Marusya. She had a holy faith in every printed word and would not believe that the newspaper was issued by the Germans. She asked Galochka: "Where did you get this from?"

"The Frenchmen told me."

Marusya smiled ironically:

"You mustn't believe everything you are told, especially by those Frenchmen. They are nice boys, but too flighty. I don't believe a word they say. . . . It says in the newspaper that Stalingrad was captured long ago—as far back as August. . . ."

Just then Christine came in. Galochka went up to her and said politely:

"Permit me to congratulate you on the capture of Stalingrad. . . ."

Galochka smiled. Christine lost her temper and struck Galochka a swinging blow. She struck her again and again. . . . It was hard to believe that the hand which had embroidered butterflies on silk could be so heavy. Galochka fell to the floor. And Christine, forgetting what she had come in for, rushed out of the room.

Christine undressed quickly and got into bed, but she could not fall asleep—the vision of Galochka's smiling face hovered before her eyes. What impudence! I didn't give her enough. . . . To think of the war ending and a slut like that getting married! What is there in her? All she

can do is sing, and the songs she sings are coarse. . . . But nobody will want to marry me even if I manage to sell the house. Besides, the war will never end, we have captured the whole of Europe and still it is not coming to an end; now they've called up Otto, and he's forty-nine. . . . For the last three months there's been nothing in the newspapers except "Stalingrad." Why can't they capture it? And that slut laughs. . . . Otto said that Cologne is a heap of ruins. They can come flying over here again, set fire to the house. . . . And then good-bye to all hope of happiness. Christine wept loudly. The next room was occupied by the overseer of another barrack. Her name was Emma; her husband had arrived on leave from the front. The partition was a thin one. While the sounds of whispering, grunts and squeals came through the partition Christine could go on weeping. Later the sounds ceased, but Christine continued to sob. There was a knock on the wall. That's Emma's husband. He is angry because I won't let him sleep. He is right—he has been at the front for three years and at last has come to visit his wife. . . . Nobody will come to visit me. . . . Christine wanted to cry louder than ever, but she suppressed her sobs at once.

The frightened girls crowded round Galochka.

"How are you feeling?" enquired Varya.

"Not so bad. Hurts a bit. . . . She may be skinny, but she's got a fist like iron. . . ."

Suddenly Galochka burst out laughing.

"You see now, don't you, Marusya? They haven't captured Stalingrad. That's what made her mad. . . . They are getting it hot there, that's clear. . . ."

She dreamed of victory. All was quiet, ever so quiet; birds were singing; it was morning. She was in a big city, red flags were fluttering on the walls of the houses. But it was not Kiev. . . . Perhaps it was Moscow? . . . The square was star-shaped. Red Army men were marching. There's Borya! He is an officer: there are many decorations on his breast. . . . Pierre was at her side. He was smiling. He wanted to say "Galochka" but he pronounced it "Galyoshka" and it sounded funny, oh so funny. . . . Waking up, Varya saw Galochka—fast asleep, with a swollen face, but smiling. And Varya sighed and said to herself: "I wish I had pleasant dreams! . . ."

This was an ordinary country town—a village in which a few two-storey houses had been built and which had become a district centre, or a township with three collective farms around it, with hens clucking in Shevchenko Street, with silvery dust in the summer and impassable mud in the spring and late autumn. The township possessed

all the usual appurtenances: a District Soviet where Styela compiled the figures of the sowing campaign and where visiting theatrical companies gave performances; District Party Secretary Gritzko who said that the township would soon become a very important centre because an experimental orchard was to be laid out here; a school and schoolteacher, Klavdia Vasilyevna, who read *A History of Philosophy* and waited for a long-expected letter from Kiev; white cottages, with the smell of sour milk and fringed paper trimmings, where they ate boiled pumpkin, reminiscenced over family events and discussed world politics; Young Pioneers in red neckties, and a motley market place, where quacking geese waxed indignant over their fate and docile bullocks munched their fodder, and where you could buy all sorts of things, even plastic ashtrays; a mechanic's workshop and a co-operative potters' shed; a few Jews, among them Schneerson, hoary with age, who had been making clothes for the local inhabitants for over half a century; tractor driver Ostap who never wore a sheepskin coat even in the coldest weather so that people could see his medal, and Ostap's grandmother, who was in the habit of saying: "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away."

The Germans came—and everything changed. The District Party Secretary went off into the forest to join the partisans. Ostap was in the army, like many others. In many of the cottages lived Red Army men who had been cut off from their units—they were given out as relatives. The Germans sent the Jews to the neighbouring town and killed them there. They also sent Klavdia Vasilyevna who had roused the ire of a German officer by saying that she had read Hegel. The people made themselves as inconspicuous as they could. Even the hens were afraid to peep into Shevchenko Street. It was said that partisans roamed the neighbouring woods, but they never came near the town. Nevertheless, the Germans left a garrison of thirty men under the command of Sergeant Reckmann, surrounded the place with barbed wire and built fortifications. At first the Germans fared well here and had a very good time; they gorged huge platefuls of fried eggs and chicken, and hunted for Communists. But later a Sonderführer arrived and told them that they must not take anything from the peasants because Germany was in need of food; and apart from that, the peasants learned how to hide their stocks. All those who could be hunted out had been caught. It was said that the partisans were becoming bolder and were attacking motor trucks. At night the Germans fired their rifles—to frighten the inhabitants and to screw up their own courage. Sergeant Reckmann told his men that the war would soon be over—all that was left was to mop up Stalingrad and capture Baku.

The autumn was mild. It was a fine day on Sunday. Reckmann yawned loudly from ennui. He never knew what to do in his spare time. Before the war he would go to a beer hall after work and there argue until he was hoarse about whether Mars was inhabited, and about where

you could get better beer—at Heinz's or at Wolf's. Sometimes he would go to the movies with scraggy Gerda; he would stare fixedly at the screen and at the same time pinch the girl. Sometimes he would go to the Arcade where there were various attractions; he would try his strength, throw balls at Aunt Sallys. But when he had no inclination to go out, or was reluctant to spend his money, he would yawn frightfully, clip the kitten's claws or, hunting up an old copy of the *Illustrierte*, would adorn the portraits of beauties with huge mustachios. What was there to do in this lousy little place? . . . He sadly recalled the times when he breakfasted on five eggs and a plateful of cream. He couldn't get a square meal now. . . . He would pay a visit to Liza in the evening. Like all the Russians, she was wild—wouldn't talk to him. But she was not bad looking! . . . The evening was still far off, however—he had a long, dull day before him. . . .

But luck was in his way. Enterprising Gläser, hunting around to find where the peasants hid their potatoes, discovered the tailor Schneerson and his wife in the cellar of a derelict house near the school. According to his passport Schneerson was eighty-six years old, but he was still a sturdy old man—tall, gaunt, with a long, white beard. His wife, a tiny woman with thin strands of hair combed back over her head, looked like a mummy. The Germans wondered who had hidden the aged couple, and who had fed them for over a year. The tailor's two grandsons had joined the army even before the Germans arrived. Reckmann wanted to interrogate the old man, but the latter's answers to the questions he put to him were totally beside the point—he was obviously off his head. . . . He couldn't send these two to Headquarters! The Sergeant therefore decided to introduce some little diversion into the dull life of the garrison. It would do the local inhabitants some good too—some scoundrels among them must have fed these two Jews, let them see. . . .

When the soldiers had rounded up the inhabitants in the public square Reckmann said:

"I will show you in a minute how we clear your land of parasites."

Schneerson was leading his wife by the hand. Her eyes were filled with childish perplexity—everything had got mixed up in her head long ago.

"Good people, I am getting married, why aren't you dancing? . . ."

The people looked on in mournful silence; some of the women wept. Schneerson said to his wife:

"Come, Rachel, it will all be over soon. . . ."

First Reckmann shot the old woman. When he took aim again Schneerson stopped him: wait! This pleased the Sergeant—the old man was about to plead for mercy, I'll make him crow like a cock as I did that ginger fellow. . . . Schneerson stooped down, closed his dead wife's eyes, straightened up again and mumbled some unintelligible words; it

was the prayer for the dead. When he finished praying he unbuttoned his shirt and pointing to his chest he said: here! This riled Reckmann and he decided to torment the refractory old man—he shot him in the shoulder. Schneerson fell to the ground, but he got up and again pointed to his chest. Reckmann shot him in the leg. The old man fell; the German stepped up to him and put his foot on his chest. People shouted: “Why torture him? . . .” Ostap’s grandmother ran up to Reckmann and offered him a dozen eggs:

“Herod, kill him, but don’t torture him!”

Reckmann took the eggs and shot Schneerson dead. After that he had such a good feed that he could scarcely move. Then he went to see Liza; belching, he wanted to embrace her. She tore herself away: “Skunk!” He said: “You won’t, eh? I’ll pack you off to Germany.” . . . Liza scratched his face. He swore: “You cat! I’ll clip your claws!” . . . But at that moment Gläser was heard shouting: “Bandits!”

Six Germans who occupied a machine-gun nest opened fire; but it was too late—the partisans rushed into the village from the south. For a long time Reckmann kept the partisans at bay with his revolver and killed one of them. Later he dropped to the ground with a bullet in his stomach. The fight lasted half an hour. Of the thirty Germans only two managed to escape; subsequently they related that the partisans numbered three hundred, and that they were led by “a Mongolian with a savage face.” Actually there were eighty partisans, and they were led by Strizhev, and the one who had been taken for “a Mongolian with a savage face” was Boris from Kiev, the founder of the Pickwick Club. It was he who killed Reckmann; and Liza hugged and kissed him: “You saved me! Saved me from that skunk!”

The village elder grovelled at the partisans’ feet: “I didn’t want to. . . . They forced me. . . .” The partisans remained in the village for several hours: the inhabitants gave them food and drink and supplied them with provisions they had hidden from the Germans. Ostap’s grandmother kept asking them:

“Haven’t you met my grandson? He’s in the Tanks. . . .”

Several women stood around, their chins propped up by their hands. They said: “They’ll catch you all. . . . They have lots of men.” . . .

Liza begged Strizhev to take her with him. Strizhev smiled and said: “You will cry. . . .”

“I never cry.”

“But what will you do? We haven’t got a chorus. . . .”

“I’ll fight. Don’t you believe me? I am a good shot. I won the Voroshilov badge.”

Strizhev said: “You don’t look like it,” nevertheless he took her.

This was a lucky day: four men lost, but they wiped out twenty-eight Fritzes and captured a large quantity of arms; it would also be easier with provisions now, they had a hard winter before them.

Boris strode along thinking of Kiev: an old woman in the village had reminded him of his mother. Where is Mother? Sasha had been in Kiev; he had told him about Zina, but he had not found Mother, probably she went away with the evacuees. . . . How is she managing alone? She is old. . . . Zina—she's a brick—working with our men. . . . Where is Raya, and Valya and Galochka? Only now do we understand what an easy life we had then. I thought it was a tragedy when Tosya jilted me. . . . No doubt man is made that way—when it's calm he imagines there's a storm. But when a storm actually breaks, he behaves as if nothing has happened: kill a Fritz, procure a tommy gun, get a stock of potatoes. . . . No, that's not all: there's something else besides, but I can't define it. . . .

Strizhev had a map torn from a school atlas: he looked at it frequently and frowned—it's a long way to the Volga! . . .

"Zakhar, did you get the last communiqué?" he enquired.

"Yes, 'In the region of Stalingrad and northwest of Tuapse.' The Germans say nothing about Stalingrad."

"There's heavy fighting there," said Boris. "Perhaps everything is being decided. . . ."

He tried to picture Stalingrad but couldn't. He had never taken part in a big battle. At the very beginning of the war his unit was surrounded. He went into the forest and there found others. . . . It would soon be eighteen months that they had been roaming the forest hunting individual Fritzes. They had spent three weeks preparing for that last operation. Thirty Germans—a mere trifle! In Stalingrad real fighting was going on; there our own fate, the fate of Leningrad, the fate of the whole of Europe was being decided. . . .

He glanced at the map. What a vast country—it can't all go on on the map. He thought of that without pride, with amazement if anything. Yes, a vast country. . . . But what is most amazing is something else: here we are, a handful of men in the forest, and over there, far away, is Stalingrad, a gigantic battle, but we think and feel the same as they do. . . . If Strizhev, Grushko, or I, no matter who, were told that we must die right now to hold a single house in Stalingrad, half a house—we would go without a second thought. No doubt that is what we mean by Motherland—it can't all go on on the map, but it all goes into our hearts. . . .

Strizhev smiled:

"A penny for your thoughts, Boris. What are you composing?"

Boris no longer made a secret of the fact that he wrote poetry: sometimes he read his verses to his comrades: Strizhev would say: "Silly stuff, but read some more. . . ." Once he delivered a whole tirade against poetry: "Who invented this idea of not talking straight but in a rat-tat-tat? First you write 'buddies' and after that 'tommies,' but suppose it's not tommy guns they've got, but ordinary rifles? . . . Give it here, I'll

read it myself later on." . . . He copied several of the poems but did not tell Boris that he had done so, he merely growled: "Very nice, but not much sense in them. You are a good fighter, but you are a romanticist. that's a fact." . . .

Grushko, however, quite frankly confessed "I like them." He even said to Liza:

"They say nature is blind. It's not true. In Rovno I saw a peacock, togged up, you couldn't imagine anything richer, but when it screeched, well, you can't say that my ears are sensitive, not by a long chalk, but it set my nerves on edge. But take a nightingale. . . . The plainest of dicky birds; you hardly even notice it. What a mug Boris has got, awful you might say, but he's got the gift. . . . When he begins to recite, a girl forgets about his mug. . . ."

"I don't think he's ugly," retorted Liza. "On the contrary. . . . His eyes, they are quite unusual. . . ."

Grushko smiled:

"There! He's got you too. . . ."

Liza said to Boris:

"They say that you are a romanticist. is that true?"

Boris made a scornful gesture:

"Nonsense! Look at the way I mop up my porridge. . . . No, seriously, I am not a romanticist. The romanticists wanted to have everything different from everybody else. Do I want that? . . . Life has turned out to be different. that's true, but not only for me; for you, for Strizhev, for everybody. I dreamed of something entirely different if you want to know, something simpler, far more prosaic. I never thought I would have to blow up trains. I had a girl friend in Kiev, a serious girl, studied the epics, but now, I am told, she is living in hiding and typing leaflets. Where does romance come in? . . . I am not in love with the moon, I have never fought a duel and have never shot a tiger . . . except for a German sergeant, perhaps. But that's not the point. What hurts is that we can do so little. We must now live only for one thing, as they are doing in Stalingrad. . . . All the time I am thinking—what terrific fighting is going on there! . . . I tell you, Stalingrad is the vindication, not only of the country, or of the epoch, but of man. . . . I'll go and ask Grushko what Moscow is reporting. . . ."

A week later they were caught in an ambush as they were emerging from the forest. There were no less than a hundred in the German detachment. Boris shouted:

"Get away! I'll hold them up. . . ."

He continued firing even after he was wounded. When, at last, the Germans screwed up courage to go up to him he no longer breathed. One of the Germans stirred his head with his foot and said:

"Tough, wasn't he? Look at the way he's peppered! . . . And a bandit like that put out six of our men! . . ."

When Strizhev learned that Boris was killed he said nothing, he merely frowned and went into the dugout. Grushko came in, Strizhev hastily thrust a notebook into his pocket—he had been reading Boris' poems.

"What are you doing?" Grushko enquired.

"Nothing.... I must call Sasha and ask him to put new tops on my boots, they've all gone to pot, that's a fact...."

But Liza cried without being the least bit ashamed; she could cry, she was a girl....

* 15 *

As far back as the summer Dr. Pashkov had written to Dmitri Alexyevich: "I was detained in Atkarsk for a day, of course, I went to see your people. Varvara Ilyinichna is worried, but she does not look so bad. Natasha I did not recognize—not long ago she was only a chit of a girl, but now she is as beautiful as a picture, as they say; misfortune has not broken her. Youth tells."

What Dr. Pashkov wrote about Natasha was quite true, her looks had indeed greatly improved. Before the war she seemed to everybody but Vasya to be just an ordinary pleasant-faced girl; now she attracted the gaze of passers-by, she could not pass unnoticed. She was slimmer, and this made her look taller; her eyes had acquired a new expression—of grief and exaltation.

But what Dr. Pashkov wrote about Varvara Ilyinichna was not true—he did not want to cause Krylov anxiety. Varvara Ilyinichna had been ailing since the spring, complained of acute pains in the stomach, scarcely ate anything and had grown terribly emaciated. The doctors did not say what was the matter with her, but from their faces Natasha could tell that her mother was seriously ill. Varvara Ilyinichna refused to go into hospital, Natasha nursed her.

The summer, which was a hard one for everybody, was exceptionally hard for Natasha. Little Vasya was down with dysentery; for several days she feared for his life. She had lots of work to do—every now and again new batches of wounded arrived from the Don Front. Varvara Ilyinichna did not complain, she would say "I feel better today," but Natasha saw that her mother was growing feebler every day. In June a letter arrived from Nina Georgiyevna, she wrote: "The cameraman Romov has arrived here from the front. He assured me that he had seen Vasya in April, he said that he could not have been mistaken because he had met him often in Minsk before the war. I don't know whether to believe him or not, I am very worried. If it is true, why has not Vasya written either to me or to you? Romov gave me the number of his field post office; here it is, in case—18614 K."

Natasha did not tell her mother about this letter from Nina Georgiyevna and gave no sign that anything important had happened. It was a difficult thing to do—she wanted to shout: “Vasya has been found!” Like Nina Georgiyevna, she was aware that Romov might have been mistaken—the whole thing was too improbable. Why has not Vasya written? . . . But if he emerged from encirclement only in April, his letter may have not had time to reach her: only two months, and it would have to be readdressed from Moscow.

She wrote to Romov begging him to describe his meeting with Vasya in greater detail. There were moments when she believed that Vasya was alive, that she would soon see him, clumsy and endearing, just as he had been in Minsk. She would say to her son: “Big Vaska has been found. He will come soon. Do you understand what I’m saying? . . .” But then she would scold herself: what’s the use of believing a rumour? One can see from her letter that Nina Georgiyevna did not believe it. . . . She lived through the whole of July in this feverish state. The weather was oppressive. Every day the names of new places appeared in the communiqués; the front drew closer to the Volga. The city was in a state of tension; people saw that the precarious tranquility of life in the rear was collapsing. Some rushed hither and thither cursing their fate; others said gloomily: “They’ll be stopped, just as they were near Moscow. We must work. . . .” Wounded men from the front talked about German tanks, mortars, retreats.

At last a reply came from Romov: “I saw Vasya riding in a staff car, he was with a major. I called to him, but he did not hear me. If it was not him, the resemblance was amazing; I cannot, of course, say with absolute certainty that it was he, the car was travelling very fast. I told Vasya’s mother that I am certain—I wanted to buck her up, she looks bad and is very worried.” . . . After reading the letter Natasha went to her room and sat for a long time in a stupor. It seemed to her that she had lost Vasya a second time. Later, she pulled herself together and went to the hospital. There she was told that Rostov had fallen. The German offensive was continuing.

Over three months passed. Wounded men arrived from Stalingrad. They described scenes of the fighting in that city: “We are holding Pavlov’s house.” . . . There was not a sign of the consternation that had prevailed in the summer. Everybody now looked stern and hard, as if they had been turned to stone. A terrific battle was in progress and no end to it could be seen. Dmitri Alexeyevich was somewhere on the Don; his letters became briefer and briefer, as if he were forgetting how to write: “I am in good health. All’s well. I embrace you and Mama.” No time for letter writing, Natasha said to herself.

Up to now she had thought that she must believe that Vasya would come back. The newspapers said—we must wait, and stories and poems were written on this theme. Now she thought that it was cowardice to

foster this hope. Around her there were so many women who had lost their husbands or sons that the loss of Vasya began to seem natural to her. Before the war, when she had judged life by what she read in books, she believed that grief was easier to bear if it was general. Now she knew that another's grief did not assuage one's own, it intensified it.

She learned how to conceal her feelings. What had become of that Natasha about whom Dmitri Alexeyevich had said that everything about her was "written on her face"? A concert was arranged for the entertainment of the wounded. A vocalist from Moscow sang humorous songs. Natasha laughed with the rest, and looking at this handsome, jovial woman it would have been difficult to believe that she would have given everything to be able to run to her room and have a good cry—for that vocalist sang the very song Vasya had sung that morning when they went to see the houses he was building....

New batches of wounded arrived. Sabaneyev performed a difficult operation: he removed a shell splinter that had grazed the gall bladder. When that was over Natasha sat at the bedside of Sergeant Kutsin who had had an arm amputated. He related: "The Fritzes were in the house opposite. It was so quiet, you could hear them talking. They kept on talking, only we didn't understand what they were saying.... We did not talk, we didn't say a word. They brought us our dinner, but we didn't touch it.... There were three of us left.... We held on for nine days...." Natasha tried to calm him: "You must not tire yourself, you will tell me about it tomorrow."... He stopped talking for a moment and then went on again: "They started banging away at us with their mortars.... Yegorov shouted something, but I did not hear. He shouted that his gun had got stuck.... The Germans came creeping up, I picked up a lemon...."

Natasha went home. The weather was dull and cheerless. Rain was coming down in a fine drizzle mixed with sleet. She saw a large streamer stretched across the front of a building: "XXV." The holidays will be here soon.... How strange—a red letter day like that, but inappropriate just now.... It is difficult to celebrate at a time like this. In Stalingrad men are laying down their lives for a single house, for a remnant of a house.... It is hard to realize.... That Sergeant, why, he is a hero and nobody knows it.... No, we must celebrate, to spite the Germans. The twenty-fifth anniversary, then it will be the fiftieth, the hundredth. We'll arrange a social evening for the wounded.... But it is hard, oh so hard!....

Varvara Ilyichna said: "Cover me, Natashenka. I feel cold."... Natasha took her mother's hand as if she wanted to stroke it, but she felt her pulse—it was rapid, feeble and irregular.... Perhaps it would be as well to call Pyotr Vasilyevich? But I am afraid to leave her alone.

"Are you feeling worse today, Mama?..."

"No, Natashenka. I felt cold, but I am warm now...."

"Perhaps you'd like some tea, or a little purée?..."

Varvara Ilyinichna shook her head. Later she seemed to have dozed off. Natasha felt her pulse: it was better.... And her breathing was regular. Still, I'll run and fetch Pyotr Vasilyevich....

When she returned Varvara Ilyinichna was dead. Her head hung over the side of the bed, the blanket was on the floor—evidently she had tried to get up.

Later Natasha scolded herself for having left the room. All the time it seemed to her that she had left something undone.... The doctor said: "We couldn't do anything. We tried everything. There are cases in which the science of medicine is powerless...."

Natasha had always taken counsel with her father: Dmitri Alexeyevich was a friend, a teacher, a judge of thoughts, feelings and actions. Now Natasha knew that her attachment to her mother was different—dark, clinging, inexplicable. I feel as though I too were dead.... She constantly had before her a vision of Mama, Mummy, Mum of her childhood, eternally busy, solicitous, quiet. She strove to save Papa and me, but she did not save herself, wore herself out....

I must write to Papa. But how can I tell him about this? She was conscious of her own responsibility—her father, full of life and vigour, now seemed a child to her. Perhaps it would be better to prepare him for it gradually? But he will only worry until he gets the next letter, and the next.... Conceal it from him? No, she had no right to do that. Would she forgive if Vasya's death were concealed from her?... She must tell the truth. But how?

Again she became absorbed in reminiscences. They had left a large portrait of Mama in Moscow. She had been very beautiful; she used to say with a shy smile: "I was often courted before I met Papa."... Natasha recalled that Mama was once down with typhus. Natasha was six years old then. Her father knelt at the bedside and kissing Mama's hand kept on repeating: "Varenka, my dear one!"... She bid farewell to Natasha then.... When they arrived in Atkarsk Mama said: "Don't despair, one can be useful here too."... Every evening she hurried to the railway station, served tea for the soldiers, sewed on their white collar linings for them, listened to the long stories they had to tell. She was already ailing, but she would never miss an evening.... Nobody really knows the kind of woman she was.... She was genuine....

"MY DEAR PAPA,

"A misfortune has fallen us. I know how strong you are, so I am writing straight out. I dare not conceal the truth from you. Mama is gone. She forbade me to write to tell you that she was sick. She fell

sick in the spring, at first we thought it was gastritis in a severe form. It was not until August that Prof. Shcheglov diagnosed it as cancer of the stomach. After radium treatment she felt some relief, but we knew that this was only temporary. Prof. Shcheglov and Sabaneyev were both strongly opposed to an operation, they said it would only cause unnecessary pain, that her heart was in such a state that it would not stand it. Mama behaved very bravely; when she felt better she resumed her work at the railway station. I tried to dissuade her from going, but this work was such a joy to her that I gave it up. Prof. Shcheglov will write to you himself, here I only want to say in his name that everything that could be done was done. Mama's mind was active until the very last day, she interested herself in everything, looked forward to your letters and made me tell her what the wounded men said. During the last month she remained in bed, she was very weak, every day she made me read to her everything in the *Pravda* and *Zvezda* about Stalingrad, and on the day before she died she said: 'I think things will go differently now, touch wood. . . .' She died on the second of November, at eleven o'clock at night. The funeral took place yesterday. Near the grave there is a tree, a birch tree. I shall plant flowers there in the spring. Papa dear, as I stood there I felt that you were by my side. Bear up, I beg of you, these are awful times! Don't worry about me. I am working, of good heart, firmly convinced that victory is near and you will come home. Your grandson is well, growing fast; he does not yet understand the times we are living in, but soon he will begin to understand, and you, Papa dear, remember that both I and little Vasya need you. I kiss and embrace you, I am with you now, always, every minute! Until we meet again dear, darling Papa,

Your Natasha."

At the hospital she said to Sabaneyev:

"We must do everything to make the evening as festive as possible. Twenty-five years! I'll go to the City Party Committee and arrange to have the cinema sent here. Suppose we show 'Defeat of the Enemy Near Moscow' and after that something jolly?..."

Sabaneyev said to Nurse Korsheva:

"I always said that our women are wonderful, one may say that that's what always kept us going. . . . And yet, I look at her and wonder—where does she get her strength from?"

It was only to little Vasya that Natasha could talk frankly:

"We are orphans, you and I, Vaska. It's awful! But we must go on living. We must. When you are big you will understand. . . . It's a good thing you don't understand now. . . . You are lying quiet, but your Mummy is crying. . . ."

During the long sleepless nights Valya thought over a great deal. She would laugh at herself: I want to understand everything. As a matter of fact she began to understand herself. Looking back at the former Valya she realized that she had not lived as she had wanted to live, that her dreams of becoming a movie actress had been childish and wayward—she had been drawn to art because she had not had a personal life; her feelings, finding no outlet for expression, had carried her into the world of imagination. But when she met Sergei everything changed; she cooled off towards her past dreams, she could have worked in an office, like Raya or Galochka, and have been happy. She had not managed to change her mode of life, for she had become Sergei's wife only two months before the war, she had not even had time to tell Sergei how much she wanted to have a child.

Why had she gone to work at the aircraft factory? Of course, she understood that these were stern times, that aeroplanes were more important than the cinema; but this consciousness was not enough to have made Valya, whom her mother had called "sleepy," who had been accustomed to living in a phantom world, find herself at a turning lathe. Sergei was not surprised, he was absorbed in the war so much that he had thought it natural. He would have been surprised had he learned that Valya could go a whole week without reading a newspaper, or listening to the radio. Sometimes she would repeat the words of communiqués over and over again a hundred times, and at others, wishing to grasp the whole meaning of the war, she would stop following its progress, would lose track of the changes in the direction of the front and fail to grasp what was meant by "art-preparation," or "divers" that Sergei wrote to her about.

Like everybody else, Valya had been shocked by the general disaster; but when thinking about what was going on her thoughts invariably returned to her own personal fate: she had found life just when everybody had been deprived of life.... She had chosen work at the factory because it was most remote from the life she had lived before—she wanted to tear herself away from the past. The work was hard, and she was glad of that: physical tiredness prevented brooding (Valya said to herself: it's better that way, I'll keep a tighter hold on myself).

After parting from Sergei she did not live, but waited for life, first in sorrow and exaltation, then, for nearly a year, patiently, and lately, despairingly. This did not affect her work; her shopmates did not see the change that had taken place in her. But she was no longer able to concentrate, unable to form a connected picture of the past, or write Sergei tender but restrained letters.

Formerly Valya had not seen life, had been unable to distinguish different people, she had lived among personages who were the product

of her own imagination. When she read about the feats of heroism performed by the partisans it seemed to her that she was reading about her father. Perhaps he too was blowing up trains! . . . She knew nothing about the fate of her friends in Kiev; but when people talked about Kiev she felt inexpressibly sad, she saw visions of neglected gardens, steep hills, of suddenly appearing misty vistas, of a vague, dark, green city.

She received a letter from Natasha informing her that she had given birth to a son and that she had still no news from Vasya. She cried a whole night—she was sorry for Vasya and Natasha, and she was frightened—had anything happened to Sergei? . . . Nina Georgiyevna wrote asking Valya to come and live with her: “You will find work here too, and it will be easier if we are together. . . .” But she did not go, she was afraid that she would find things harder with Sergei’s mother—that she would give free rein to her longing. Here she was alone, although she had many acquaintances: as always, she was friendly, she helped her shopmates and was regarded as a sympathetic person. She became secretive and superstitious; she would say to herself: if I meet a girl in a green beret I will receive a letter; if Shumov is in my shift tomorrow all will end well. . . . She would be angry with herself: I am like an old woman, I shall go out of my mind if I continue like this! . . . But the feeling of dread concerning her own future gained the upper hand. She tried to read, would take up a book, but soon put it aside: the intricate plot of the novel seemed petty compared with reality.

Letters from Sergei alone sustained her, but he wrote irregularly: sometimes he would write three days running, and then several weeks would pass without a letter; suddenly she would get a line expressing his love and she would cheer up, her spirits would rise, and then would come a dry tale about everyday army life, or else a curt “I am well. Write. Many kisses.”

Rereading one of Sergei’s last letters Valya suddenly guessed where he was. For a long time she stood in front of a fence on which an old tattered copy of the *Krasnaya Zvezda* was posted—her eye caught a report from Stalingrad. When she read the words: “Never in its history has the world seen such battles as are being fought here” she realized that it was hell there, real hell, where one could not remain alive a minute. . . . And Sergei was there. . . . She was overcome by mixed feelings of admiration for Sergei’s courage and horror, that dark horror that made one want to howl.

Many other people went through what Valya was experiencing; but the others possessed an antidote—absorption in their work, care for their families, conversation about world events, about Churchill’s arrival in Moscow, about the second front, the struggle waged by the partisans in Yugoslavia, the difficulties of everyday existence—the appearance or disappearance of milk, expeditions for a sack of potatoes, the quest for firewood in preparation for the approaching winter, a lecture on the

war situation, or the first night of the play "Russian People." But Valya was indifferent to the affairs of everyday life, did not notice what meals were served in the dining room, did not dream of new dresses; when, on rare occasions, she did go to the theatre, it was with difficulty that she compelled herself to concentrate her mind on what was proceeding on the stage. All her thoughts, all her feelings, were absorbed in one thing: what is happening to Sergei? Her unbalanced nature, her rich imagination and her heightened sensitiveness which had formerly drawn her to art, now served to magnify her torments. When hearing tales about the front, about fields pitted with shell holes, or about mortar bombardments, she saw visions of the lifeless landscape of the moon with craters and lakes, of gigantic forests of barbed wire, of a world corroded by acids and discoloured with verdigris, and of lightning which struck down stunned, deafened and dumbfounded men. The nightmares which tormented mothers, wives and lovers at night haunted her in the daytime too. She wore a locket containing a small photograph of Sergei, taken from a certificate, so that the fancied image of the livid-faced dead might not block out the living—there were moments when she could not recall Sergei's face.

In the middle of October the people at the factory began to make preparations for the anniversary evening. They knew that Valya had studied at the Cinema Institute, and among themselves they called her "the actress"—sometimes affectionately and sometimes scornfully. Zholtyakov, the Party organizer, said to her: "You must help us out. Some people are coming from the theatre, but they asked us to put on turns of our own..." At first Valya refused to take part: "I haven't done anything like it for a long time... I can't."... Superstitiously, she was afraid to return to the past even for an hour. But Zholtyakov insisted, and she was obliged to consent.

The large barrack that served as the factory dining room seemed to be filled with mist, the lights were blurred. The place was crammed. People stood in the aisles and open doorways, many had climbed on to the stage. Valya was to recite three poems, all about the war. She was nervous: suppose I forget my lines—as if she had never had anything to do with the stage.

She recited well, and her emotion, which broke the rhythm of the lines several times, served to heighten the effect; her longing for and anxiety about Sergei, the horrible pictures that hovered before her eyes, told: she put into the words another meaning which she alone understood. The following lines she read exceptionally well:

*Down below, among the sabres, boots and spurs,
So small, she barely reached one's waist,
Silent, like a summer cornflower,
A strange young maiden roamed....*

This was a poem about a little girl who was caught in the midst of a frightful, unintelligible battle. Valya recited the lines with an embarrassed smile, and, as always when she smiled, her face became inexplicably attractive. Suddenly, the whole audience saw in her the little, blue-eyed girl on the battlefield.... The applause continued long after she had finished. And she stood on the stage, very pale, with the vague smile still on her lips.

A soldier pushed his way towards her. He said:

"Permit me, a man who has been through it, to shake your hand. You expressed it fine. It gripped the heart..."

Orlovsky, an actor who was to follow Valya, laughed and said:

"You have finished me. It's no use my going on after you. I mean it seriously. You have real talent. You ought to study..."

Orlovsky spoke in earnest. Valya had indeed moved him. He loved art as it could be loved only by an actor who was tired of trash and who knew that there was acting that could move crusty people to tears, make them wring their hands, recall their vows of fidelity, go out to meet death. Valya did not answer him. Zholtayakov said with pride:

"She's our actress. She studied the art before the war..."

Then he congratulated Valya and added:

"Orlovsky liked it..."

In the past Valya would have blushed with pleasure and would have thought to herself: so there is something in me, I will be an actress.... But now, looking at Orlovsky, she thought: what sad eyes he has; he must be in torment, like everybody else....

A soloist sang several songs. The people were noisy. The first snow fell. But Valya walked home as if in a trance—again the picture of the greenish, moonlit field, night, death, hovered before her eyes. Softly she said: "Sergei."... Nobody answered. He is not here—he is in Stalingrad....

* 17 *

It was an ordinary day; like the day before and a week ago, mortars were banging away, eight tanks rushed at Shileiko's battery, Levin operated on the wounded, and heavy barges crossed from the left bank to the right. Zonin was shaving, and swearing, for he had no mirror and kept feeling his cheeks to ascertain whether he had left any rough patches; he wanted to look as smart as possible. He congratulated Sergei and said with a wry smile:

"It looks like anything in the world but a holiday..."

He related how he had celebrated the anniversary in nineteen forty—before the war. It was a long story and a perfect jumble: the military parade, two tickets for the theatre, the tenor Kozlovsky, supper at his brother's and Marusya. Sergei scarcely listened to him, he wanted to

sleep. If he could only get a good sleep for once! . . . In Paris motor drivers were prohibited from sounding their horns at night. Lancier had explained that the constant hooting had a bad effect upon the nerves and shortened life. But it turns out that it is possible to live even here. . . . This will never end; on the right we are unable to cross to the right bank, and on the left the Germans can't push us across to the left bank; they push forward ten metres and then we push them back again. . . . Few metres, but many casualties. The Colonel promised to send reinforcements. . . .

The army newspaper arrived, it bore a heading in red—XXV. He recalled the time when he was seven years old—the plates rattled on the sideboard, his mother would not let him go to the window although he had wanted to very much. His father came home, he wore a red band on his arm; he said: "Congratulations, Nina, the cadets have surrendered." . . . Before the bombing started in August there were many children here. What will they remember in twenty-five years' time? . . . No doubt everything will seem different; we will be dressed up in smart clothes, boots highly polished, and they'll make us speak in historical phrases. You can't print the sappers' swear words in school history books! . . . Twenty-five years—it's half a lifetime. . . . Abroad they thought that we would hold out for two years, five at the most, and then we would collapse. Perhaps even now they think we won't hold out long. But we will. . . . The worst happened in August. . . . If only we could have a good sleep, after that we could start all over again. . . . The ice will begin to form on the Volga soon. . . . They say that man is a very frail creature. . . . Werther died from unrequited love. But if a hippopotamus were brought here it would not live a day. . . . Zonin is talking, but I am not listening to him, he will be offended. . . .

"Marusya likes the Art Theatre, but I like things on the stage to be different from real life. . . ."

Isn't Zonin a frail creature? We are all frail, but the Germans cannot crush us. Perhaps this will really go into history, like Tsaritsyn. . . . I heard Stalin in nineteen thirty-eight, he spoke calmly and unhurriedly, and made humorous remarks. He will speak today; no, he spoke last night, we'll get his speech today, it was impossible to listen in last night, the Germans were bombing the crossing. . . . No doubt he spoke calmly, it's our good fortune that he can remain calm. . . .

"Listen, Sergei," said Zonin, "when you were away this morning, one of our signals bumped into a lot of Fritzes, he killed three of them and barely got away. I heard him swearing like anything. I went up to him and asked what was the matter, and he said: 'I left my pincers there.' . . . But he said nothing about bumping into the Fritzes. . . ."

Sergei laughed:

"I was just thinking how the people of Stalingrad will talk in some classical novel in twenty years' time. 'The Volga . . . ancient heroes. . . ."

History is gazing at us. . . .’ But what that signalsman said was really historic: ‘Left my pincers. . . .’

He is not Nivelles. . . . Why are our people so afraid to speak in high sounding terms? Even I am. I like to hear Frenchmen speak with fervour—everyone of them is a Hugo—but suddenly I feel embarrassed and I want to pull them by the sleeve. . . . Mado said about herself: “I too am a mute Juliet.” . . . What has happened to Mado? She has not settled down—her restlessness does not spring from what goes on around her, it springs from within her. . . .

Why did we not cross the borderline that separates dreams from life? We did not want to—neither she nor I. Like two children. . . . We realized that it was impossible. . . . Mado said that we would each live our own life.

Zonin was still engaged in his reminiscences:

“We saw ‘Gisèle.’ Ulanova danced. Marusya didn’t like it. I thought it was fine. Like a dream. . . .”

“I shall never forget Mado,” mused Sergei. “One cannot live for that, but one needs it in order to live.”

Zonin yawned:

“I want to sleep. . . .”

“Don’t you think I want to sleep?”

“Funny, isn’t it? On one side there is the whole of Europe and on the other a patch of ground—and yet we are holding on. . . .”

“Why ‘the whole of Europe?’”

“Well, nearly the whole. . . . Look! I found it in the dugout. I can make out the title—Anatole France, a novel. Some Fritz must have been reading it. . . . I tell you—it’s Europe.”

“When an ambassador hoists his flag over a house, that house is his country, that’s the accepted rule. . . . Europe is here now, we can hoist a flag over this dugout. Or do you think Anatole France is with the Fritzes?”

“I haven’t read him. I suppose Marusya has. I used to go to the theatre rather often, but I haven’t read much. You pore over drawings all day long until your head is fit to burst, so you want to go somewhere at night. I am particularly fond of the ballet. . . . Marusya has read a lot, and she used to laugh at me and say that I like everything that’s fantastic. She likes it herself, but pretends not to, because for some reason she thinks that since she is studying to be a doctor it doesn’t suit her. . . . But look, isn’t she a jolly girl? . . .”

Zonin showed Sergei a photograph of Marusya taken with a kitten. Her eyes had a slight squint. She had the face of a little girl full of mischief.

“This was taken before the war in Luga. . . . The last letter I’ve had from her is dated the third of October, over a month.”

Sergei sat down to write to Valya; he wanted to convey the ardour, longing and tenderness he felt, but he was unable to express it; he thought to himself with horror: another month or two and I shall forget how to speak....

Zonin emitted a terrific yawn.

"Take a nap," said Sergei. "I'll go and see the Major. They have no doubt heard the speech."

Zonin was sitting on a log, sleeping with his eyes open and dreaming a confused dream: Marusya, a barge, the flag of Europe, Gisèle, pincers.... Then Marusya drew his head down and kissed him again and again. Silence reigned—for half an hour, or perhaps longer.

A shell burst near the dugout. Zonin woke up in the battalion hospital base and tried to recall what had happened: I was asleep, I think. Sergei went off to see the Major....

"Did Stalin speak?"

"You must not talk," answered Sergei.

"What did he say?"

"That our day will come...."

But Zonin did not hear, he had sunk into oblivion again.

Nurse Katya had written in a notebook all the dates right up to the new year. Every night she struck out a date. She now took out the notebook and with evident pleasure struck out the figure "7."

"Fifty-four days left."

"To what?"

"To the end of the year."

Levin smiled sadly:

"And then you will write out three hundred and sixty-five new ones, won't you?"

"Perhaps I won't," answered Katya. "How is he?..." She pointed to Zonin.

Sergei sat silently gazing at his friend. It was quiet again.... Suppose I had not gone to see the Major.... What a silly game!... But the Fritzes are fizzling out; they are not what they were a month ago.... Stalin knows the general situation, and if he says a thing, it will be so.... But when? Too late for Zonin.... But perhaps not, Levin says there is some hope.... His wife is in Yaroslavl I think. It's harder for them there than it is for us here. It must be awful to picture a thing like this....

He wanted to write another letter to Valya, but he was called to the crossing. He no longer thought about his wife, or about Zonin, or about the outcome of the battle—he was hard at work.

"I beg of you, *mon ami*, leave my nervous system alone and think about the fate of Roche aîné! Roy may dig up Alpert any minute. Since Joseph died I have had no one I can rely on there. I need a man who is well in with the Germans. . . ."

"Everybody is well in with them," answered Morillot. "Especially Roy. . . ."

"Why am I talking to him about this?" thought Lancier to himself reproachfully. "He only likes to poke fun at me. . . ."

But Morillot did help him: he introduced him to Pinaud.

Pinaud possessed neither Berty's brilliance nor his breadth of action. He put no passion in his work. Ten years ago, when everything was still quiet, he would say: "I'd like to insure myself even against earthquakes, although we are not living in Japan." . . . He lived on a modest scale, rarely entertained guests, and did not throw his money about. He gave his eldest daughter Pauline in marriage to M. Pinson, a merchant of Lyons, and his younger daughter, Henriette, to a young but promising lawyer named Verneuil; he understood that politics were connected with taxes, contracts and Stock Exchange prices, closely watched the manoeuvres of parliamentary parties, hated the Communists, called the Socialists "fools," and concerning the extreme Rights he would say: "Those surgeons will cut out the intestines together with the appendix."

When the war broke out Pinaud soon made a pile; there was nothing surprising about that: a plant that manufactured radiators can, of course, manufacture mortars, and when war is on the threshold, mortars, of course, sell "like hot cakes" (Pinaud's favourite expression); first the French bought them and later the Germans. It goes without saying that Pinaud was shocked by the events of nineteen forty, he even lost weight and his clothes hung loosely on him. But business is business, and seeing that business was going well, he soon forgot his vexation over civic matters. He had never made so much money in his life. He was reserved in his relations with the Germans; his bearing made a favourable impression upon them—there was something solemn and mournful about him, he spoke in a loud whisper and sniffed, as they do at funerals.

Pinaud plunged into Stock Exchange speculation; he became the owner of a big printing plant, and for next to nothing bought a house that had belonged to a Jew. He would say to his wife: "These are hard times, of course, but it would be a sin to complain; we are alive, the children are provided for, and Pauline and Henriette have married well." . . . Verneuil was unfaithful to Henriette, everybody knew this but she, but he behaved affectionately towards her and refused her nothing. "A fellow like that will always keep his head above water," Pinaud would say. Three years ago Verneuil was regarded almost as a "Red," but now he was in the good books of the Germans, wrote for

the newspapers and did not disdain the part of a commercial agent. Pinson, Pauline's husband, sold his warehouse when the war broke out and bought a hotel in Geneva; a few weeks before the débâcle he went to Switzerland with his wife and child. It was said that he was pro-British. Pinaud pictured to himself Pinson meeting Verneuil—what a scrap there would be!... But Pinaud never went to extremes, he collaborated with the Germans, but had no objection to the Allies winning the war.

When Morillot told Pinaud about the danger that threatened Roche aîné the latter was not surprised:

"It is permissible to collaborate with the Germans, but I don't like jackals like Roy. There are too many upstarts in the financial and industrial world nowadays.... All right, I am willing to meet Lancier...."

Pinaud offered Lancier his assistance. Lancier realized that Pinaud could save Roche aîné—the Germans would not dare touch him.... Pinaud wanted to invest money in the business. But Lancier did not want to bind himself to a stranger—he had suffered enough with Léo and with Roy....

Negotiations commenced. Pinaud's attitude towards Lancier was rather patronizing: he was of the opinion that neither the atmosphere of Corbeille nor frivolous manners befitted a businessman; but while mentally laughing at the "crank," he took care not to hurt his pride and talked to him as if he, Lancier, were the founder of Roche aîné.

Lancier invited Pinaud and his wife for dinner. The negotiations made favourable progress; Maurice said jokingly to Marthe: "This dinner today is almost like an engagement party. Perhaps there will be a wedding soon!" He also invited Morillot to the dinner as the "match-maker." It was a dull November day; the electric light had been on in the house since the morning. Everybody sneezed and coughed. The Pinauds liked Marthe for her simplicity and domesticity. They conversed animatedly and recalled prewar times. But Lancier was getting anxious; Morillot was late, where could he have got to? The mutton will be overdone, that was no joke....

They decided not to wait for Morillot any longer and sat down at the table. Lancier was angry. Pinaud tried to soothe his ire:

"You know the kind of man Morillot is. He has probably gone to the other end of the town to see a patient; and won't take a fee, either.... That's a man who deserves a monument. Honest toilers were not appreciated in this country. Swindlers and intriguers received all the honours. That was one of the causes of the débâcle...."

"The Germans have taught us a great deal," answered Lancier. "Still, it is hard to be dependent upon aliens. Do you think this will ever end, Monsieur Pinaud?..."

Marthe threw Maurice a reproachful glance: why say such things?... Pinaud creates a favourable impression, of course, but can anybody be

trusted these days?... Lancier understood his wife's glance, but he was not sorry for what he had said: he would have to work with Pinaud, so it was as well that he should know everything in advance to avoid surprises later on....

"In the end the Germans will go," answered Pinaud. "I have no complaint to make against them, they are behaving decently, but I am a Frenchman, and I understand you.... Verneuil told me that after they have achieved victory the Germans will leave France, and all the other countries.... They will only set up governments that will suit them...."

"Nobody will dare shift the Marshal as long as he is alive."

"The Marshal is only a figurehead. The Germans prefer Déat to Laval, and Laval to Darlan. There are shades of difference in this. Personally, I think that for twenty or thirty years, Europe will be German...."

Morillot entered, puffing and blowing. Marthe began to chide him in a motherly way:

"You have punished yourself; you will have to eat warmed up food...."

Dr. Morillot said nothing for some time; he ate his soup, glancing slyly now at Lancier and now at Pinaud; at last, wiping his mouth with his serviette, he, as was his habit, laughed very loudly:

"Verneuil will not sleep tonight. I shall have to prescribe a sleeping draught for him. Haven't you heard? The Americans and the English have landed in Algiers."

Pinaud was unable to conceal his agitation. This was to have been expected, of course, but there are lots of things one expects, but still they come as a surprise.... He had often said to himself that if the Allies were victorious he would be the first to welcome them. Who would dare cast stones at him! Who are the saints? It's easy for Pinson to be an irreconcilable—he is in Geneva. But even Pinson admits that his father-in-law is an honest Frenchman.... Nevertheless, Pinaud felt uncomfortable: they will institute enquiries: Where did he get the printing plant? How did he buy the house? Why did his factory work three shifts under the Germans? The people who envy him will offer their services. The Communists will crawl out of their holes as they did in nineteen thirty-six.... A gloomy prospect!

"You look upset, Monsieur Pinaud," remarked the doctor.

The impudence of that old cynic! Marthe realized how tactless that remark was and before Pinaud could reply she said:

"I really don't understand why you must talk politics at table!"

Pinaud decided that she was right and began to peel a luscious pear.

Lancier smiled. So they have landed! Perhaps the happiness of pre-war years will return? Nothing could resurrect Marceline, but he would go to Gelinotte with Marthe.... Yes, I wrote that obituary about Berty. I got a little heated, that's what I'll say—got a little heated, didn't weigh

my words. . . . What does it matter? After all, Berty was my son-in-law. What has politics to do with it? I am not Pinaud, the Germans persecuted me. Louis went to England, and no doubt Mado is there too. That's the kind of upbringing I gave my children! . . . I wonder whether the Allies will land in Marseilles soon. It's not far from Algiers. . . . In Marseilles the Marshal will welcome them. I can imagine how glad he must be now! . . . And Lancier continued to smile. He realized that it would be unwise to be too frank in Pinaud's presence—Marthe would be displeased, so he tried to explain his smile:

"I have not eaten such a delicious pear for a long time. . . ."

Morillot was all bespattered with pear juice and saliva—he was still smiling, pleased with the impression his news had created. A little later he said:

"Well, so they have landed. There's nothing sensational about that. They will grab our colonies. Had they wanted to fight the Germans in earnest they would have chosen another place. . . ."

After the guests had departed Lancier pondered over the events and decided that it would be unwise to have dealings with Pinaud. The war was reaching its climax. Pinaud was compromised with the Germans. I have trouble now because Alpert is a Jew. When the Germans are expelled they will torment me with questions about why I was in partnership with Pinaud. Incidentally, he grabbed a house that had belonged to a Jew. . . . Better not have any partners, to be answerable only for oneself. . . . Lancier said to Marthe:

"You know how devoted I was to Marceline. Fate made me a widower. And fate sent you to me. I bless my fate: how good it is to bind one's heart with another's. . . . But it is different in business—it is the single ones who are happy. Pinaud is a respectable man, he does not push himself forward as poor Berty did. I hope he has no trouble after we have achieved victory. Still, it will be better if I have no dealings with him. . . ."

Two days later Lancier learned that the Germans had crossed the line of demarcation and had occupied Lyons and Marseilles. So they intend to defend themselves in earnest, to fortify the South as they have done the Atlantic coast. Morillot was right when he said that the Allies are in no hurry. The mice are too eager to kill the cat. One day, perhaps, the Allies will be victorious, but by that time Roy will have managed to read the burial service over me.

For several days Lancier lived in mental anguish and at last decided to accept Pinaud's offer.

"You know, Marthe. I got a little heated the other day. The Germans are a terrific force. Morillot is pleased with the fact that a hundred or so Russians are hiding in the cellars of Stalingrad. That's a mere bagatelle. Between Algiers and Marseilles lies the sea. We must reckon with the facts. Pinaud will be able to save Roche aîné. The more so that his

son-in-law Verneuil is a perfect go-getter. I am told that he is on a thoroughly friendly footing with Abetz...."

When Pinaud and Lancier finished the business part of their conversation they passed on to politics. During the past ten days everything had changed—the Allies were in Algiers and the Germans were in Marseilles.

"I never thought Darlan would betray the Marshal," said Lancier.

"I don't blame Darlan. What could he do?... He has saved many lives. Are you convinced that the Marshal did not send him there for that purpose?..."

Lancier was amazed: Pinaud thinks as I do.... Well, of course, Pinaud is a Frenchman—like me, like the Marshal....

"My dear Monsieur Pinaud, events are so complicated that one gets confused. I trust the Marshal...."

"The Marshal is a figurehead.... But the people around him want to save France from anarchy. The most frightful menace is—Communism. One can be opposed to 'collaboration' and yet welcome the dispatch of 'Legionnaires' to the Eastern Front. To fight the Bolsheviks is the duty of every Frenchman. In this I am in absolute agreement with Laval."

"Laval has gone to Munich to see Hitler. Don't you think that is going too far?..."

"Not a bit. It is his duty, just as it is Darlan's duty to reach an agreement with the Americans.... We must prepare for all contingencies. We have our own French policy.... I am very glad the Americans have accepted Darlan and Giraud. The Communists will now see that they have nothing to hope for in a victory for the Allies...."

Lancier was more amazed than ever. He had regarded Pinaud as a mere money grabber, but it turns out that he is a philosopher, that he is playing a game, and for high stakes at that....

That same evening Lancier went to see Morillot: he wanted to inform him of his discovery. He found Morillot sitting glumly in a dark room. His wife was not at home. Lancier was so absorbed in his own thoughts that he failed to observe the mood the doctor was in. As soon as he entered the room he exclaimed:

"It turns out that Pinaud is not only a businessman, but also a politician and a patriot. He put it this way: we must prepare for all contingencies...."

"I should say so! Even his daughters operate on two fronts. You can be quite sure, Maurice, that you will be absolutely safe with him. He is a double-dyed scoundrel. He is no Darlan, of course, but he is shrewd enough to be able to save Roche aîné."

"Do you think Darlan is a scoundrel?"

"That depends upon what you mean by scoundrel. Speaking generally, a lackey is not bound to be faithful to his master. Darlan has

changed his job.... They are all of the same feather—Laval, Darlan, the Marshal....”

Only now did Lancier notice that Morillot was out of sorts—he had not laughed once....

“Are you feeling unwell?” he enquired.

“I?... What does that matter at our age? We are still hobbling along, and we ought to be thankful for that. The young are dying.... Pinaud, or Darlan, are trying to make up their minds which side to back—the American patron or the German bully. Meanwhile the young are perishing....”

“Where is René, do you know?”

“He was in the South.... Perhaps the Germans have already captured him....”

Lancier knew that René, the doctor’s eldest son, had got into trouble with the Germans—after the student demonstrations he fled to the “Free Zone.”

“I understand you, mon cher ami. I too am suffering. I don’t know what has happened to Louis. Perhaps he is in Algiers, or perhaps he is killed. And I don’t know where Mado is.... Perhaps your Pierre is better off than any of them—it’s hard lines being a prisoner of war, but then he is out of the game. When the war’s over he will come home....”

“I don’t know. A friend of Pierre’s came to see me yesterday. They were in the ‘Stalag’ together. The Germans released him—he is in the last stage of consumption. He told me how they lived in that camp—soup made of potato peelings, unheated barracks, hard labour. And their conditions are better than those of the Russians. Russian girls working beside them are dying of starvation and dysentery, the women overseers beat them, it’s downright barbarism!... That lad told me that Pierre struck up a friendship with a Russian girl, they help each other, she is a jolly girl and tries to comfort him. Pierre is weak, lifts weights with difficulty.... I am afraid he’ll not hold out, he has weak lungs.”

For the first time Lancier saw tears in Morillot’s eyes. The doctor turned his head away and said:

“You see, I was right about Stalingrad. This is not diplomacy. Have you read the *Paris Soir*? The Germans write: ‘The German army is prepared for all contingencies....’ Strange language for victors.... Do you know, Maurice, I doubt whether I shall live to see the climax, and to tell the truth I don’t very much want to. I have no illusions. The more things change the more they remain the same. But just now I feel glad that the Russians have checked them. I am glad that Pinaud is afraid, that Darlan is seeking the Americans and that the Americans are seeking Darlan.

“What an awful man,” thought Lancier. “He is glad that others are in trouble. But the young are to be pitied, that’s true—Louis, René and Pierre. What has happened to Mado?...”

It was already a month that Mado had been living the life of a nomad; she arrived in a town, looked for a street, a house, a man, uttered silly words, such as, "your aunt has the grippe," or "I have a canary for sale," passed on instructions, enquired whether leaflets had been issued or what the situation was as regards dynamite, and went away. She was serving as a messenger. Her appearance roused no suspicion. She could, in an instant, transform herself into a foolish country girl, a woman of easy morals, or into a young lady interested in smart clothes; she could quickly change her clothes, her manners and her vocabulary; she could be sophisticated, mincing, simple, weep and say that her father was dying, chatter about the latest fashions in hairdress, feel at home in any surroundings and lose herself in a crowd. Her comrades said: "Send France, she will get through."...

Towns flashed past: Lyons with its fogs, dark side-streets, backyards, secrets of the street and secrets of the heart; Marseilles, invariably motley and noisy, where the old prostitutes of the port turned out to be heroines and humanist philosophers peddled with everything they could—coffee, fake works of art and the heads of patriots; smoky St.-Etienne, and that old coquette Nice. The autumn rain beat against the railway car window, fields with motionless cows dashed past, peasants were gathering the grape harvest, on a riverbank women were rinsing clothes, mountains sloped down to the sea in steep, rugged cliffs.

Sometimes she walked along a highroad lined with poplars, turned down a lane, wrinkled like the face of an old woman, ascended a hill by a narrow track, and entered a peasant's house, where a dog barked, a smoky lamp was burning and onions were drying. Sometimes her feet were covered with red, heavy clay, sometimes with silvery dust. She stayed the night, and in the morning she went away.

Around her life proceeded in its own way. The vinegrowers said that nineteen forty-two would be a "big year." Village lads bought forged papers to enable them to escape deportation to Germany. Young married couples bought coupons for a wardrobe, or a bed. In the schools the children heard stories about how Grandpa Pétain saved France. People sold the Germans wine, sausage, oranges, antique miniatures, perfumes and pornographic photographs, and bought from them cigarettes, razor blades and aspirin. Everybody was trading, bargaining, reselling. Many grew rich, decorated their homes with pictures, gave big dinners. France saw brides in their wedding dresses, mamas with their broods dressed in their Sunday best, tipsy dreamers, loving couples, and old men playing tric-trac. How alone we are!—she mused. How many are there in our ranks? Ten thousand, a hundred thousand, perhaps, I don't know. . . . But the rest have adapted themselves. They are discontented, of course, talk about the war which is remote to them—say that the Allies are in Africa,

that Stalingrad is still holding out. . . . But how far away they are—both Stalingrad and Algiers! But the German Kommandatur is only a couple of paces away. It is possible to make money, dine well, and if you are very much an irreconcilable, you can listen in to what London says. But if you utter a single careless word, you are sent to Germany, or tortured to death at the Gestapo. . . . A lawyer who sheltered France one night, said to her “Only lunatics can fight them”; and he added: “I, too, am a lunatic”—he regarded himself as a hero. People spoke in whispers, and this whispering haunted Mado like the unceasing autumn rain. People not only feared the Germans, they feared each other, their neighbours, their fellow office employees, chatterboxes, provocateurs, stool pigeons, paid and voluntary spies, pseudo Reds, and people with two sets of papers and a double conscience. Where is the France that shouted at the crossroads, that boasted of her temperament, of her barricades, of her couplet writers? When a German passes by, somebody or other is sure to put on an ingratiating smile. . . .

Even Toulon brought about no change. For a moment everything stood stock-still, as if a distant explosion had stunned the country. But after that? . . . One may write poems about a suicide, one may mourn over him, but one cannot follow his example.

Raoul was an old Communist. France believed that he understood more than others did; she asked him: “We write about Toulon, but why did they blow the ships up, why didn’t they put out to sea, put up a fight? . . .” Raoul laughed and said: “The ships were officered by Vichy-ites. We ought to be thankful they did not surrender the ships to the Germans.” . . .

In Paris, Mado had not seen much of what was going on: she lived underground. Here, every day, she came in contact with apathetic people. Luc had said in the summer: “We are the reconnoitering force; the army is far behind.” . . . Will the army come up in time? . . . It was not so long ago that France had rejoiced to hear people in a café, or in a railway car, talking about Stalingrad. Now such talk depressed her more than ever. . . . Over there people were dying, but here, a young strapping fellow, having sold a keg of wine, and taking a drink to celebrate the deal, whispers: “The Russians are splendid.” . . . They think that somebody is going to liberate them—the Bolsheviks, the radio announcers in London, the Americans who landed in Algiers, cunning Darlan, it makes no difference who. Even the boldest of them, those who gave her shelter for a night, shook their heads and said: “Why be in such a hurry? You kill one Boche and they retaliate by shooting a hundred of our people. There’s heavy fighting in Russia. The Allies will land, if not now then in the spring. We must wait.” . . . And everybody was saying: wait, we must wait!

Mado was delighted to see Josette. This was in a whitewashed room that looked like a monk’s cell: a crucifix, the smell of incense, a rough

table. Josette was aware that Mado was in a hurry and therefore got down to business at once:

"Tell Raoul that we will take up the matter of the mines. At present we are preparing for an operation on the railway. We need arms. All we have is about a dozen revolvers, it's ridiculous. We may have a clash any day. . . . When will you see Raoul?"

"Tomorrow evening, if I don't miss the train. . . ."

"That means that you will be back here on Thursday or Friday. We'll talk about everything then. Only one question: have you seen Henri?"

"I saw him on the eve of my departure from Paris. That was a month ago, a little more. . . . He is well, in good spirits, and the way he talked to me cheered me up immensely."

On leaving, Mado said hurriedly:

"He said that all's well with Mimi. . . ."

When France spoke to Raoul about Tommy guns he laughed:

"Do you think we are rich? We have four—captured from the Germans. The English drop them only for the A.S., but they don't give us any. . . ."

He paused for a moment and then laughed again:

"You try to talk to them, perhaps you will be able to wheedle something out of them. There is a teacher of literature here. . . . I am not much of a diplomat, and besides, they know me as an irreconcilable. You are a Parisienne, and you look so meek. . . . You can't tell with those people—it depends upon the mood they are in."

George Ramel, a teacher of literature at the local lycée, whom France had to interview, had not been interested in politics before the war. He was twenty-nine, had married just before the war, and doted on his wife. After the surrender he was plunged in gloom, avoided meeting his friends and even stopped talking to his wife. One day she said to him: "Is the prestige of the state more important to you than everything else? There are things in life besides that. . . ." He answered: "You don't understand. It makes no difference to me where the frontiers run, or who will be victorious. Those are matters for the military, or the politicians. . . . Something else hurts me: the Germans are in Paris. Rich or poor, one can live, but this life is not worth living. . . ." When a fellow teacher at the school invited Ramel to join the Resistance organization, he did not hesitate for a moment. There were all sorts of people in the Jeanne d'Arc group: a tailor who had formerly made Ramel's clothes, two students, a journalist who worked for a Catholic newspaper, the young widow of an army officer who was killed in nineteen forty, a textile mill owner, an old turner, a doctor and an attorney. Ramel had already taken part in two operations: receiving arms which the English dropped by parachute. He knew that his life hung by a hair, but life seemed worth living to him now.

France met him at the office of a dentist who assisted the Jeanne d'Arc group. Ramel arrived with his face tied up: after the recent arrests he had been warned to take precautions. France explained her mission to him. He at once felt friendly towards her. He thought to himself: What divides us? They are doing the same kind of work that we are doing. This is not election time, people are not dying according to party ticket. . . . When France stopped speaking he said:

"I will discuss the matter with my colleagues. Come again tomorrow. The dentist here has numerous patients, so there is no danger. . . . We shall be able to meet in private again."

That same evening Ramel informed Nadaud about the request he had received from the Communists.

"Impossible," answered Nadaud. "We have explicit instructions not to give them arms. We may exchange information, report provocateurs, help them to hide, but no more. . . ."

"But I don't understand; what do we want all these light machine guns for?"

"We disagree with them on fundamentals. They engage in petty operations, kill Boches, damage railway tracks, recently they blew up a water works. This only serves to intensify reprisals. What the Communists are most concerned about is propaganda. We regard things from the national point of view. Our duty is to form a real army underground. When the Allies land, we shall have combat units, well-armed, and led by regular army officers."

When he met France again, Ramel said:

"I regret to say that it is impossible. We are opposed to premature operations. Such is the opinion of our leaders."

"What then, in the opinion of your leaders, should we do?"

"Muster forces and wait."

How many times had Mado heard that word: "Wait"! Up till now she had heard it from cravens who clung to their savings bank books, mirrored wardrobes and glass of aperitif. But this man. . . . Why, he may be arrested today and tortured in the dungeons of the Gestapo. . . .

"Wait, what for?"

"For a landing."

"It's a funny game. The Allies are waiting until the Russians weaken the Germans, you are waiting until the Allies land in France, while the people are waiting until you screw up courage to act. The result will be that some Durand from Vichy, who won't let you come near him, will come out on top. . . ."

As she spoke she nervously crumpled her glove. Ramel forgot about his instructions; the idea that this woman might think he was a coward made him feel uncomfortable.

"If you want to know my opinion, I think they are wrong. At the present time it is easier to shoot than to conceal arms. . . . But I need

not tell you what discipline means. When the Soviet-German pact was signed, I, like many others, was of the opinion that the Communists were traitors. I was wrong, I admit it. You had your own tactics. The people who order us to wait also have their tactics. One of my colleagues is a Communist—before the war he was called upon to renounce his views. I knew that on many points he disagreed with the position taken by your deputies, but he said to me: ‘When there’s a fight on you don’t philosophize—you fight.’... He was arrested, I don’t know what became of him. At that time I thought he was a fanatic. I was wrong in that too. Now I am fighting, and I don’t want to speculate as to whether the people in London are right or wrong. You know better than I do what loyalty is....”

On taking her leave Mado said:

“I am sorry I have not been able to get any arms. And I am sorry for you....”

He pressed her hand tightly:

“I wish you luck.”

When France told Raoul about her conversation with Ramel he laughed:

“So he talks about loyalty? They are loyal to themselves, that’s true.... They are afraid of us. Ramel does not understand these matters. I sent you to him because he is the most decent of them. There’s one fellow among them, his name is Nadaud, a former protégé of Flandin’s; he openly says: ‘At the moment of victory we must be stronger than the Communists.’... Tell Pauline that they must procure arms from the Germans—they are our only armourers. And find out whether any progress is being made as regards tungsten....”

When Josette saw her she was troubled:

“The operation is to take place tonight. There may be a search. I will send you to an old woman who lives on the hill overlooking the town. In the morning, go down to Levallet, but avoid all the guard posts. At seven o’clock, outside of Levallet, one of our messengers, a girl, will be waiting for you—I will let you know the result, so that you can tell Raoul....”

“At what time is the operation to take place?”

“At four.”

“Raoul enquired about the mines....”

France barely dragged her feet along—it was a long, steep climb, she had not slept for two nights. It was one of the first winter evenings, and the evening was cold. In the tiny cottage the old peasant woman put some water on to boil and muttered something to herself. Later she gave Mado and her granddaughter some supper and kept talking to herself all the time. France could not understand what she was saying. Perhaps she had gone out of her mind?

France tried to sleep, but could not; every now and again she struck

a match and looked at her watch. At a quarter to four she went out and stood near the house, waiting. The night was dark, a dog barked somewhere in the distance. The noise of an approaching train rose from the valley, it sounded like the breathing of a man suffering from a cold. Then came a terrific roar. The old woman came running out of the house and said: "Holy Mary be praised!" Mado smiled: the old woman knew everything. We are not alone! Even an old woman like that is with us. . . . And at once Mado felt calm. She sat down and dozed: she was afraid to oversleep. The old woman lit the fire and again muttered something to herself.

It was still dark when France began to descend the hill. Before reaching the path leading to Levallet she saw a little girl with a ribbon plaited in her hair; she was shivering with cold. The girl gave the password: "I will buy a bucket in the market." Unable to restrain herself, Mado stroked the girl's hair. The girl said in a businesslike tone:

"A hundred and eighty-six Boches—it was a train with men going on leave. None of our men are hurt. About the tungsten—that will be done in the beginning of December."

She held a reader and some exercise books—she was on her way to school. The sun rose over the hills, rosy and misty, like a scene on the stage.

Mado was in the train again. Bare trees passengers' faces and the names of railway stations flashed by. She was thinking about something, but she was so tired that she did not know what she was thinking about. Perhaps it was about fate. . . .

Raoul said:

"A hundred and eighty-six? Splendid! Do you know, the Germans here got the wind up; there's been a raid, and Ramel has been arrested. Go and get some sleep, you will have to go to Lyons tomorrow. . . ."

* 20 *

The firing was so heavy that Osip opened his mouth, and his eyes bulged. Looking at him Minayev wanted to laugh, but he didn't. Later Minayev said: "That was some music, eh? . . . One day people will say—concert, symphony, Beethoven, but I will never forget this. . . ." But at that moment Minayev, like the rest of the men, was not thinking about anything. They were not even conscious of the gusts of cold wind. They were living in wearying, tormenting expectation. But when Minayev climbed to the top of the steep hill his will was as strong as if he had been waiting for this moment all his life—from the time he played his boyish games, from the time he read his first book. That moment had been preceded by so much tearless suffering, so many lost friends and grim communiqués. They had grown to love and to hate

this steppe. Osip would say: "I will remember this all my life," and one day he thought to himself: "I only hope I will never dream about it. . . . They could no longer remain silent, or swear, or hope. Over a hundred days. . . . And at last there had come what they had not dared dream of, for what they had prepared in an everyday, businesslike way, like preparing for the sowing, for blowing in a new blast furnace, for a difficult examination. It was a frosty morning, and only on reaching the summit of the hill, wiping his face with his sleeve, did Minayev feel that it was cold, just cold—not that he felt cold (he felt hot if anything) cold in general—winter. . . . What nonsense enters one's head! What's winter got to do with it? The offensive had started. . . .

Millions had prepared for this moment. In the rear, in the course of their daily exercises, soldiers had stormed heights, crossed fields and lay flat in hollows. In the factories women had worked like mad day and night, worn out by privation and loneliness, with pallid faces, as if the war had squeezed the life out of them. Weary engine drivers had driven heavily laden trains under a hail of bombs. Sappers had rehearsed a thousand times the motions of cutting wire and of clearing passages through mine fields. Logs had been accumulated for making future river crossings. Curly-haired girls were trained to regulate traffic on roads on which the Germans were still calmly travelling. Cases of canned food, cots for the wounded and fuel tanks were counted up. No snow had yet fallen, but felt boots were already being unloaded. There were thousands of maps; the Commander of the Front, the General, Colonel Ignatov, Osip—all pored over maps on which the positions of the enemy's divisions and regiments were indicated. They knew who occupied a particular height—where the Italians were, the Rumanians, the Germans; they knew what kind of Germans—fresh or battered, S.S. men or reserves. They knew that the men in the Italian Ravenna Division were saying to each other: "Why have we come here?" and that the German Seventy-First Division had come from Reims. The Intelligence Department wrote out the names of the generals of the Reichswehr, took note of the German second echelons, read letters written in crooked Gothic script in which Lieutenant Schmidt informed his wife that all leave had been stopped. Editors of Front, Army and Divisional newspapers prepared special issues containing the call to strike the "decisive blow." Poets wrote verses, and printers' compositors in dugouts, or on trucks, set up over and over again the word "o f f e n s i v e." Political instructors read to the men the diaries of the German butchers, spoke about the wounds that had been inflicted upon our country, tested hearts in the way a mechanic tests a motor. The plan was drawn up, divided into details and put together again. A top rank general who suffered from a diseased liver made a tour of the positions, concealing from the others that he had just had an attack. Colonel Ignatov said to Osip: "At six nought nought." Stalin, his pupils dilated from lack of sleep, pored over the map, and the steppe,

mounds and ravines spread out before his eyes—he knew that territory by heart. He had to foresee what was impossible to foresee—that our tanks would find enemy aircraft in Tatsinskaya, and that it would be necessary, later on, to burn these aircraft; that some German generals would be in favour of a timely retreat while others would be opposed to it, that Mannstein would have many tanks at his command, but that at the last moment he would prove to be a pedant; he had to foresee the enemy's skill and the blunders he might possibly commit—everything, from late rains to an early ice-break, to the influence of the moon, blunders and accident.

While these long and persevering preparations were in progress, the battalion of which Osip was now in command was subjected to hurricane fire, repulsed German attacks, tried to counter-attack to avoid being pushed back, and bled—few were left of those who on that sultry August day had for the first time gazed mournfully at this cheerless place. Here lay buried Senior Lieutenant Zarubin, whom Minayev had nicknamed “Mister” because he had been so slow; Zarubin was killed in a counter-attack. Here were the graves of anti-tank gunners Shapovalov, Zagvozdev, Magaradze, Butenko, Brodsky and of many others. “Damned mound,” Minayev kept on repeating.

All was ready, and it all started exactly when it was supposed to start. For the men of the battalion it started at the first gun pit in which, swearing like mad, scout Lyubimov, ex-barber at the Sochi sanatorium, killed two Germans with the butt of his rifle. When, later on, Minayev said, quite seriously this time, “a real historical moment,” Lyubimov waved his hand in disgust and turned away—it was all right to mention history when it was far away, but there was no time for it here. . . .

Colonel Ignatov regarded Osip as an excellent commander. What pleased him was that Major Alpert never got excited and never became despondent, he was always cool and even-tempered. One day the Colonel thought to himself: It would be an awful bore to have to live with a fellow like that, he is enough to make one want to hang oneself, but he is a good fighter. . . . Osip fought as he had worked before the war—coolly and in deadly earnest—to him it was like being in the factory, he was only grieved at having to destroy. . . . What was sometimes called the “romance of war”—the hazard of the game, love of danger, unhabitual mode of life—marches, campfires, tents in the forest, living without a wife, without women, with that constant longing for a woman that was like an unbearable itch, with tender letters and coarse oaths—all this was nothing to Osip. He dreamed of the day when the war would end and it would be possible to work, to build, to organize; he longed for home life; he admired Raya, but when he looked at the photograph that she had sent him he would sigh:—to think that a woman like that should be fighting; that's what the Germans have done! He pictured to himself how hard it must be for Mama and Alyenka as

evacuees (Raya had written that they were in Uzbekistan); he hated the Germans also for the fact that they had marred the life of a little child—they had torn Alya from her mother for a year, maybe for years. In his mind the war presented itself as a disgusting disease which the people's body must vanquish. This, perhaps, explains why Osip became so friendly with his men who, like he, longed for their families and hated the Germans for gutting their homes, killing innocent people, and for turning their lives upside down. Speaking of their commander the men said: "He understands." . . . During the first months of the war Osip had asked himself: Do I speak plainly enough for the men to understand, or is it "newspaper talk" (Raya used to laugh); perhaps I don't put enough feeling into it? But at that time he was still a commissar. . . . He no longer thought about this now, he felt what everybody else was feeling. . . .

It was hard work to attack; it was said that things were easier on the right where the Rumanians were. Here they had Germans against them, and the Germans were putting up a desperate resistance. They advanced slowly. They suffered heavy casualties. The men were tired and glum. But somewhere within them there flickered a gleam of hope: it looked as though it was in earnest this time. . . . At one moment Minayev would growl: "We capture three homesteads and go mad with joy over it, but they hold nearly the whole of Europe"; but at another moment he would go into raptures: "They will roll back now, the first push is the hardest." . . .

Minayev, the same as ever, asserted that "the Germans deliberately abandoned the Rumanians—they have no time for music now," he laughed over the reports about the war in Africa and said: "The Bey of Algiers got a bump on the head long ago." Then the inevitable "Doctor Goebbels" turned up. The pup was still alive and never left Minayev for a moment—it followed at his heels even under fire, "on his belly, like a scout," said Minayev proudly. . . .

"Well, now, Doctor Goebbels, you've got your wish—we're advancing, only in the opposite direction. . . ."

"Doctor Goebbels" barked.

A few days later things became easier: they had only Rumanians against them. Minayev gave out slips of paper bearing the inscription: such and such a number of fiddlers for despatch to P.O.W. camp—he couldn't bother to send a convoy with them! The Rumanians cheerfully marched off to the rear and Minayev exclaimed in admiration:

"Look at them! They are as merry as if they were hurrying to a wedding. . . ."

Later, forty Germans, headed by a lieutenant, put up their hands. This was something new. . . . But there was no time to ponder over the behaviour of the Fritzes. The Seventh Department will deal with them, they love to dabble in psychoanalysis there. . . .

A railway station. Hundreds of railway cars—German, French, Belgian, Polish, Czech—pale lions, crowns, tricolour cockades and a brand new black eagle. The whole of Europe had come rolling to this cheerless steppe. . . . Automobiles of different makes with motor drivers teeming around them like ants—extracting needed parts. The printers of the army newspaper came dashing up in the hope of getting some newsprint, but so far they had dug up only two cases of French wine. Men eating sardines, asparagus and chocolate, and swapping cigarette lighters and pipes. Squashed tanks. A gun—already loaded to shoot, they had not managed to fire it. A dead German gazing down the long road with his one remaining eye, and there were tears in that eye.

"What the hell! I went to the C.P. but Ignatov was already gone. . . ."

Osip laughed. How many times had he said that in the summer? But we were on the run then. . . . It was all right now. Even the disorder makes you glad: everything was on the move, marching, rolling on. . . .

There will be no mail for a long time. . . .

Minayev reread an old letter from his mother and said to Osip:

"My little mother is always inventing something. Now she has a grand plan: to put Hitler in a cage and exhibit him in all countries. I can just imagine what a sensation this would create if it were published in England. They would at once form a Society for the Protection of Hitler. She's a vigorous little woman is my mother. . . ."

Osip managed to write a letter to Raya: "Everything is going splendidly out here, you will soon read about it in the newspapers. . . . I have never been in better health, I am only anxious about you. Rayechka, I was never able to tell you the most important thing. I am absolutely incapable of formulating it, but believe me, I do not forget you for a moment, even when I am thinking about other things. I am anxious about Mama and Alyenka, I am told that the climate where they are is hard for those who are unaccustomed to it, and I don't know how they are off for provisions. Send me Mama's letters. I ardently embrace you, my dear sergeant!"

Ignatov summoned Osip:

"We must dig in as strongly as possible. The Fritzes will try to break through, they have no alternative. . . ."

He told his orderly to bring some champagne.

"Trophies, from France. . . . I have never tasted it before. let's try it. . . . We've got something to drink to. . . . The General said that it will be given over the radio tonight in the 'last hour news.' The situation is interesting. . . ."

He drew his finger over the map: "This is the horse shoe. . . ."

When Osip got back to the battalion Minayev gasped with astonishment:

"Where did you get vodka?"

"It wasn't vodka, it was champagne. I drank a glass. It was like lemonade.... But do you know what's happened? We've surrounded them!"

"I said you were drunk! What are you talking about? How can they be surrounded if they retreated seven kilometres yesterday? ..."

"You don't understand anything. I tell you they are surrounded. I don't mean those opposite us, I mean the whole lot, the whole of the Stalingrad group. It's absolutely true. I can't get over it myself...."

Usually cool and dispassionate, he flung his arms around Minayev's neck. And Minayev, laughing with joy, said:

"On the whole, my little mother was right. We'll put him in a cage...."

* 21 *

The last few weeks had seemed vivid and disconnected to Louis, like fragments of a dream when one wakes up in the middle of the night; the parade on the aerodrome, the fat and pompous general from Iran who said "I adore the Folies Bergère," beautiful women who looked like the miniatures at Corbeille, mountains, then the sea and icebergs, the Russian officer in a fur cap.... Strange to think that only recently he had been in London....

On the eve of his departure Major Davis had said to him:

"Stalingrad is living its last days; but I am not pessimistic, the winter will prevent the Germans from following up their success. Yesterday's reports alter everything. It is obvious that we shall not confine ourselves to North Africa. In the spring operations may commence in the Balkans.... It is a pity you are leaving. But, of course, Russia is the point of attraction now, I understand that...."

Louis was regarded with mixed feelings—admiration and pity: he was going to meet death. London was still experiencing the joy of resurrection; afternoon teas seemed exceptionally pleasant, and modest family parties exceptionally cosy. Only the invading Americans who possessed lots of money, cigarettes and chocolate and still more boisterous cheerfulness, and who walked arm-in-arm with pale, pastel-like English girls, reminded one that the war was not yet over, that much suffering still lay ahead. Louis had felt no regret on leaving the city that had been dear to him during the winter of air raids—lately he had felt a stranger in it.

No sooner did he arrive in Rayac than he heard the news: the Americans had reached an agreement with Darlan. What the hell did this mean? Those damned politics again! They were waging war as if it were a game of poker; you couldn't make head or tail of it. If you've got to die, then you prefer to die for something that is simple and constant. He heard that in Algiers, the people who had been arrested under

Pétain were still being kept in goal. Soon, perhaps, we shall be proclaimed deserters and policemen will be acclaimed as heroes! . . .

Meeting new comrades, feverish preparations, the Leopards of Normandy Badge on the breast, arguments about which fighter planes were better—the Soviet or American—all this eclipsed Darlan and drove out thoughts about the future.

Not far from the French aerodrome there was an American base. The airmen invited the Americans to supper. Louis sat next to Lieutenant Jeffer, a giant with baby-blue eyes. At first he embarrassed Louis by his manners: he leaned his elbows on the table, almost lying on it, blew cigarette smoke right into the eyes of his neighbours, and prefaced every sentence he uttered with the exclamation “O!” Later Louis thought to himself: “But then, he says what he thinks. You can’t drag a word out of an Englishman. . . .” Towards the end of the evening everybody was tipsy and the company became rather noisy.

“There are a lot of brave men among the French,” said Jeffer. “Well, that’s understandable, you had Napoleon and Lafayette. But you must admit that you are out-of-date. You can’t get a “Messer” down with a Devoitine. The Britishers were better prepared, but they were out-of-date too. A pity you haven’t been to America—it really is the New World.”

This riled Louis.

“The English had nothing when the war started. They set to work after we were defeated. As for you Americans, you haven’t done any fighting yet. . . . I can’t understand what you are boasting about. If the English are a Channel-width cleverer than we are, then you are a whole ocean-width cleverer. . . .”

Jeffer failed to understand the last remark; Louis repeated it and then Jeffer burst into a roar of laughter:

“Oh! Your humour is pure American!”

His laughter riled Louis more than ever.

“You have struck a deal with Darlan. Is that, too, American humour?”

“I don’t understand much about that,” answered Jeffer. “That’s politics, and all I was interested in before the war was my job, movies and boxing. But what’s wrong with it? Our Major told us that this deal saved the lives of many Americans. We are not Russians. None of us wants to die for nothing. . . .”

“Do you think the Russians want to?”

“Oh! The Russians are heroes, everybody knows that. But we take a different attitude towards life. . . . I read in the newspaper that a Russian airman rammed a German bomber. That was a fine stunt—for the movies. I don’t see any sense in it. . . .”

“It is evident that you don’t know what misfortune is. We Frenchmen can now understand the Russians better than you. . . .”

"I saw a Russian. He was held up at our place for two days; it was bad flying weather. A very nice fellow. I wanted to give him a cigarette lighter, but he didn't smoke...."

"Don't you think he wants to live as much as you do? Granted that the dollar stands higher than the ruble and the franc; but what about the life of a Russian or a Frenchman?..."

Louis saw that Jeffer was not listening to him. The American said:

"Oh! You talk very nicely. All Frenchmen talk nicely.... You'll see, we Americans will soon liberate France.... I'd like to make you a present of a cigarette lighter—the latest pattern...."

It seemed to Louis that this had been very long ago. He was walking down the street in a Russian town. Snow was falling; white-feathered birds, thoughtful and silent, were flying swiftly over the world, alighting on one's head, one's shoulders, one's eyelashes. Here people's faces were different—so sad. They had dear ones at the front, no doubt. A queer town: a huge house, and next to it a wooden hovel, few shops, no cafés, the people often walked in the cobble-stone road....

"Can you read their writing, Louis?"

"No. And I don't understand them when they talk. But you feel that they are fighting.... I wonder whether we will get to Stalingrad. It will take us several months to get used to their aircraft.... Everything is different here. The cigarettes have mouthpieces, and they drink spirits not after, but before dinner.... I have written out twenty words already, I intend to learn the language.... We've had no newspapers for a week, René, we know nothing about what's going on...."

That night they stood in front of a loudspeaker. All they understood was the one word "Stalingrad."

Louis asked the interpreter:

"Is it holding on?"

The interpreter answered:

"This was the 'last hour news': results of the offensive. Ninety-five thousand Germans killed and seventy-two thousand taken prisoner. The German army is surrounded...."

"Where?"

"At Stalingrad."

Louis ran to tell René.

"Have you heard? The Boches are surrounded! This is the beginning, René!... That's for Paris, for Toulon, for everything...."

He stood there and laughed. I think I can see a patch of blue sky, the sun over France. They think I am drunk.... I haven't had any vodka, but I am drunk.... We'll be going into action soon.... They are providing us with "Yaks." The Major said they were splendid craft.... Let it be soon! Pity I can't send a few telegrams. To Major Davis, London: Stalingrad has turned out different. He knows, of course, but I'd like to put my name to it.... I have not been there, but I am

a Frenchman. France, Mother's grave, the tall ash tree with the sparse leaves against the blue sky. And the Boches. I must write to Jeffer: Thanks for the lighter, I don't like the cigarettes with the mouthpieces, but they are fighting here, and I'd like you to know, Jeffer, that the Russians not only know how to die, they also know how to lick the Boches. . . . And another one—to some unknown girl in Paris, or Tours, or in some small village, Bécon-sur-Bruyères: My dear, we shall come back from the cold land of Russia victorious. . . . I think I am really drunk, but I have not had anything. The Boches are surrounded! . . . Well, they can't do all the surrounding. . . . I am glad I'm here! . . .

Several days later the French airmen went to the circus. They applauded the acrobat, the lean, tired-looking bareback rider, and the lugubrious clown. During the interval people crowded round them and enquired: "English?" They answered: "French."

A woman, no longer young, approached Louis and offered him a handkerchief. Louis was confused and did not know what to do. The interpreter came to his assistance. The woman said:

"I have read Zola. My son is an airman, like you. . . . Please take this as a souvenir. . . ."

Louis wanted to kiss her, but he was too shy. He merely held the tiny piece of fabric in his broad palm like a butterfly, afraid to crush it, and kept on repeating "thank you." The woman looked like his mother. . . .

"It is very cold here, René, but you know, I have never before felt such warmth. . . ."

They walked down a dark, deserted street, and the silent snow kept falling and falling.

* 22 *

Keller was lathering his cheeks with his shaving brush and thinking: nobody would recognize me, neither Gerda nor Mimi. During the past three months I have aged twenty years. On my thirty-fourth birthday I said to Willi that I had lived half my life; I did not think then that the end was so near. . . . I must look back, try to understand the past. . . .

But Keller could not concentrate his thoughts. He had not shaved for a long time and cut his chin; for some reason he thought: it would be a good thing to get a shell splinter in my backside. . . . But at once the answering thought came: that won't save me, we are in a kettle. Before they used to take the wounded out in "Junkers," but now they are taking only senior officers. And so—this is the end. . . . The past few years have been kaleidoscopic and hectic: war, Mimi, Lotte, the red-haired girl in Kharkov, lots of drink, fun with boys like Willi—they hanged a pup for some reason. . . . It was time he pulled himself up. . . . But his thoughts went wandering again: Corporal Stellbrecht got the bread ration for Krummer and Grün, but they were killed in the

morning. Stellbrecht put the bread in his knapsack. Now he has gone to see the Oberleutnant. . . . I have never stolen anything in my life; even when a child I never took sweets from the sideboard. But God, how hungry I am! It's unfair—why should Stellbrecht get four hundred and fifty grams? He's got more strength than I have. . . . Let him suspect, he can't prove anything. Keller searched the knapsack, but there was no bread there. The skunk! He has eaten it already! Suddenly Keller laughed—this would make a lovely story: an anthropologist, of whom Professor Borhardt had said: "He is one of the hopes of German science," tempted by a piece of bread, makes an unsuccessful attempt to steal. . . . When I had occasion to ask my brother-in-law for a loan of three hundred marks I calculated for a whole week to make sure I would be able to repay it in time. All our civilization is varnish—it peels off in an instant. I am so hungry I could strangle a man for a piece of bread.

They had been in the torments of this damned kettle for two months. At first nobody knew they were surrounded; perhaps the generals knew, but Oberleutnant Krause did not. He sent Vögler on leave, but the latter came back shouting: "Congratulations! It seems we are in a real kettle!" Many of the men would not believe him: We have surrounded the Russians, how can we be in a kettle? . . . But it turned out that Vögler was right.

When speaking to Keller, Oberleutnant Krause made it clear that he was speaking not to an ordinary Non-Com, but to a lecturer at the Heidelberg University. Keller knew how to hold his tongue and Krause sometimes told him things that he did not tell others. As far back as the beginning of December he had told Keller that "the Divisional Commander is insisting on a retreat to Rostov"; many generals were of the same opinion, but among the officers there were such as insisted that it was necessary "to defend Stalingrad at all costs" (Krause had added: "Those are party fanatics, men who are ignorant in military matters"). This had flabbergasted Keller; what had amazed him most was the candour of the Oberleutnant who was not afraid to censure the "party fanatics." That was how the sceptics had expressed themselves in nineteen thirty-three; later, even if such thoughts did enter one's head one uttered them only to one's wife, and then only in a whisper. . . . Clearly, things must be in a bad way if a fellow like Krause lets his tongue wag like that. . . . We have been storming Stalingrad since August; only recently an order was received to destroy the last points of resistance. And suddenly there is a change of scene: it turns out that we are the "defenders of Stalingrad." I can't make head or tail of it. . . .

Little had changed in their everyday life. The same unbearable roar of artillery, the same battles for a house, or a trench, Willi's childish indecencies, Wergau's bravado and Schmidt's lamentations. Food was short, but still they got some. Vögler said that the Rumanian cavalry

had been converted into infantry as all the horses had been assigned for the cook pot to feed the men. Goulash of horse flesh was very popular. Wergau gorged himself and shouted: "I'd slaughter those Rumanians if I had my way! When we commandeer a pig, or a goose, they are right on the spot, but when we have to beat off the Ivans they are not to be found."...

Krause announced: an order has come from the Führer: hold on in spite of everything. A vast army equipped with tanks, under the command of von Mannstein, is hastening to the relief of the besieged forces.

Another two weeks passed. Vögler was killed by a Russian sniper. The cold weather set in. The bread ration was still further reduced. The men lost strength from hunger and cold. Oberleutnant Krause kept on repeating: "Relief is coming soon."... But in private conversation with Keller he said: "Mannstein's tanks are held up. We were supposed to fight our way towards them, but something went wrong.... It's those upstart authorities who can do nothing but shout.... There's only one thing to do now—hold on. Germany's honour is at stake. This is Christmas Eve, by no means a merry one...."

On Christmas day each man received a pound of bread, some tinned food and a little rum. Keller felt sad. He was so weak that the very first sip of rum made him tipsy. He longed for comfort and good cheer, but the Russians were banging away at their sector with exceptional fury. The bastards, they had no respect for Christmas!... Keller pictured to himself a Christmas tree sprinkled all over with sparkling frost and Rudi hugging a wooden carbine.... Gerda had made long preparations for that day, had bought a particularly fat goose and had baked a cake with almonds and candied peel.... He thought he had eaten enough, and yet he could not think calmly about food.... Is man just an animal?... Even on a night like this I can't feel more exalted!... He forced himself to think of Gerda; for some reason he pictured her as she had been when they had first met—weak and confiding. She sighed when he embraced her. He asked her: "Have I hurt you?" She answered: "No. I sighed with happiness...." Dear Gerda, he would never see her again! He blew his nose—the tears had got into it. He could not fall asleep—so acutely, so intensely did he pity himself.

Everybody is down in the dumps, thought Keller in self-consolation. It's because we don't get enough to eat. Can a grown-up man live on a sparrow's ration? Wergau was regarded as the sturdiest man in the company; he could easily stand long marches, never funk, and never complained of the cold. He was held in high esteem, although some of the men disliked his rough ways. There was scarcely a town in which he had not killed somebody, not only Jews, or Communists, one can understand that, but ordinary inhabitants.... In Kharkov he hanged a woman on a balcony and shouted "She's a bandit." But later he confessed: "She

hid a gold watch under the floor boards, and she made me sweat before I found it." Now Wergau was unrecognizable; all day long he whined: "Why must I suffer so? Have I done any harm? I feel as though all my inside is turning upside down..." Schmidt went around showing everybody a sheet of paper, yellowed by time, bearing the following inscription: "On January the seventh, in the year sixteen hundred and seventy-eight, holy Saint Dorothea appeared before me, poor sinner, and said that he who copies this, repeats the Lord's Prayer thrice and gives alms to a pilgrim, will be protected by the almighty Saviour from fire, cold, hunger and from intestinal disturbances."... Keller called Schmidt an "ass," but for all that he copied the charm, repeated the Lord's Prayer three times and thought to himself: I wouldn't refuse alms myself just now.... Schmidt kept sighing and enquiring: "Why did we come here?..." Everybody said that you couldn't find another fool like him even in Bavaria (he was the only Bavarian in the company); but for all that, Keller, like Schmidt, asked himself: Why am I here?...

There were rumours that the Russians had presented an ultimatum, promising to spare the lives of all those who surrendered. Keller screwed up courage to ask Oberleutnant Krause whether this was true. Krause answered:

"I have heard it too.... Don't think that I am initiated into the secrets of the gods."

"But do you think there is any chance?..."

"No. We are not up against the French, or the English. We can't surrender to the Russians. Too much has happened..." He thought for a moment, trying to find the right expression. "What I mean is, the struggle has become too embittered..."

That night Willi whispered to Keller:

"I can't stand any more of this. If I had more pluck I'd poke my head out and let an Ivan kill me. It's easy for the General to die, he has had his day, and besides, he's not suffering; he has enough to eat, and his dugout is so protected that no shell can pierce it.... But I haven't enjoyed life yet. I am only nineteen.... Why must I die? They say the Russians have called upon us to surrender..."

"Nothing will come of it. They promise to spare our lives, but afterwards they will kill us..."

"Why?"

"They are Asiatics. It's in their blood. And besides, they've got it in for us. I have just remembered Wergau hanging those three in Millerovo..."

"I did not hang anybody," Willi hastened to say. "I only had my photograph taken next to the gallows twice, but that was just for fun..."

"You need not excuse yourself to me, I am not an Ivan..."

Keller thought to himself: How nice it was in Dijon! But who knows what the French would have done to us had we fallen into their

clutches? . . . Mimi got a hiding only because she used to meet me. And what about Professor Dumas? . . . He's a fierce old boy; he could cut your throat. . . . Perhaps we are to blame to some extent. After all, we invaded their country, and that's always unpleasant. . . . And sometimes our men were a bit too rough. I didn't do anything bad myself; true, I created a shindy now and again after a few drinks, but that doesn't count. . . . They don't like us. Nobody likes us . . . they envy and fear us. . . . But I wouldn't swear that Wergau behaved properly in France. I don't know, he was not in our regiment then. Here in Russia he rode the high horse too much. . . . I myself have not killed a single civilian. We had to be stern; you can't say "please" and "pardon me" to the Russians, they're not accustomed to that sort of thing. . . . True, that girl refused to go, so I dragged her. But is that a crime? When a man has been deprived of feminine company for a long time he ignores the rules of polite society. But I didn't do her any harm; she cried because all the Russians are a bit touched; it's enough to read Dostoyevsky to see that. . . . It's different with Wergau or Vögler, they went too far. . . . But you can't blame them. . . . The Oberleutnant is a mild-mannered man, if anything, he's no fanatic, but even he hanged several bandits, one of them a girl. . . . The Russians put our backs up against them from the very beginning—they refuse to resign themselves to the situation. But on the whole, Krause is right—we've got to hold on, we have no alternative.

Next morning they learned that in the middle of the night Wergau deserted to the Russians. The Oberleutnant said: "I always thought he was more of a butcher than a soldier." . . . Willi swore: "That swine has outwitted us all." . . .

Why are we in the dumps? Keller asked himself. Two months ago the situation was desperate for the Russians, but they held on. Only a lunatic would say that they are braver than we are. There are cowards in all armies, it's not a matter of cowardice. . . . The Russians are fighting on their own territory, they have been defending their own city. The Führer calls us the "defenders of Stalingrad," but that sounds funny to me. Why should I defend the ruins of a Russian city? Schmidt is right, it makes you giddy to think how far we have come. It made me feel glad in the summer: almost in Asia, camels, exotic scenes. But now it frightens me. It's awful to die no matter where you are, but it is particularly so when you are far from home. . . .

It was exactly ten years ago, in January nineteen thirty-three. Keller was walking home from the University with Müllers. It was very cold. They were discussing Professor Borhardt's lectures. Suddenly Müllers stopped and asked almost in a whisper: "Don't you think Hitler is mad? I have heard him speak, he is a typical paranoiac. . . ." Keller answered: "I don't know. . . . But don't say this to anybody. . . ." Yes. I too had my doubts at that time. True, I never put it as bluntly as Müllers did, but still, I had my doubts. Later on I believed that the Führer was a genius.

Everybody believed it. How could one not believe: he led us from victory to victory. But perhaps Müllers was right? . . . To drive all the youth of Germany into this inferno and abandon them. . . . It's awful that I am beginning to argue as the Bolsheviks do in their leaflets. I may be dead within an hour from now; I am behaving like a traitor before my death. Disgusting! But what must I die for? I don't know. . . . I don't know anything.

Corporal Stellbrecht came in with the bread. He handed Keller a slice and said:

"Oberleutnant Krause has been killed. He stuck his head out of the trench. . . ."

Keller made no reply; he snatched the bread out of Stellbrecht's hand, and there was such ferocity in his eyes and in his hooked fingers that Stellbrecht swore and called him a "wild rat." . . . But Keller gobbled up the bread, closed his eyes and resumed his reflections—call me a rat, I don't care, but what am I dying for? . . .

* 23 *

Sergei was glad when he heard that Major General Petryakov was to hand out the decorations. He had seen the General at the crossing on several occasions, but those were hectic days and he had not been able to have a good look at the man of whom he had heard so much; he remembered only that he was rather short and walked with a limp.

Wonderful stories were told about Petryakov's courage and coolness. One day Major Shileiko was reporting to the General. A mortar shell exploded. The General was hurled off his feet and half buried. He got up, shook himself and said to the Major: "Damned nuisance!" . . . Later Shileiko related: "Everything was swimming in front of my eyes, but he says: 'Spot that battery.' . . ."

General Petryakov looked like an elderly agronomist, or a village doctor: he had a kind, somewhat puffy face; his badly fitting eyeglasses invariably slipped down to the fleshy end of his nose; he spoke in a low, even voice. Once Colonel Rumyantsev asked him: "How is it you never lose your temper, Ilya Vasilyevich? I have never heard you raise your voice. . . ." Petryakov smiled: "At home I would go off the deep end sometimes, but you can't do that sort of thing here—it's noisy enough as it is, and you could never make yourself heard above the racket. It is more effective when you talk quietly." . . .

Petryakov was the son of a cabinet maker. As a boy he had dreamed of becoming a sculptor; but when civil war broke out he went to fight Denikin and remained in the army afterwards. He studied long and hard and had a reverential respect for science. His wife, a schoolteacher, could not understand her husband's passion for the military art; once,

in the first year of their married life, she asked him: "Do you mean to tell me you are fond of war?" He adjusted his glasses and with the embarrassed air in which he always spoke when thinking of something important, he answered: "No, Tanyusha, I am not fond of war, and it is hard for me to imagine a man who is. . . . But the stronger our army is, the less will be the danger of war. Our men are a sturdy lot, but we lack knowledge, I feel that myself." . . .

To get to the General, Sergei had to cross the Volga twice. He vaguely recalled what he had gone through: over there, under the ice—October nights, sunken barges, friends, defence fighting. . . . Was all that really in the past? . . . Somehow he had not managed to grasp the change. Only recently they had been wondering whether they would be able to hold on another day, German tanks were creeping up, it was impossible to raise one's head over the parapet. But now the Germans had dug in, were hiding. The fighting line had shifted far to the West. The Fritzes were everywhere, their numbers were great, but they were no longer what they were. And the words "right bank" no longer had the meaning that had determined Sergei's life for a hundred days. Everything had changed.

General Petryakov smiled:

"It was Captain Vlahov who was awarded the decoration, but I am handing it to a major. It is not a mistake, but the logic of events. . . ."

Sergei received the Red Banner, Lieutenant Vasilenko the Order of Lenin. The General congratulated them. They reached the C.P. It was a frosty, sunny day. The snow compassionately covered the mutilated earth. Petryakov said:

"You have been here from the beginning, haven't you? What a city this was! We shall have to build it all anew. What is your speciality, Comrade Major?"

"Bridges."

"You'll have plenty of work. . . . I don't suppose there's a single bridge left. I started in the war on the Niemen. How many of those bridges I have seen! We built and built, and then. . . . Say, do you understand what's happened to the Germans? I don't. Yesterday they brought in a prisoner—a major, well-read, but he talked like a savage. What universities and libraries they had! But they came here, destroyed everything, and now they have burrowed underground and are gnawing horse bones. They are Troglodytes! . . ."

Vasilenko had been a schoolteacher before the war; he said:

"It's a matter of upbringing, Comrade General. . . ."

"You are right. We soldiers only learn to fight. And our role is restricted: to train a good soldier you must have a man, but we don't make men, they are made in their early childhood. . . . At the beginning of the war we fought badly, that's no secret. . . . If we held on, it was

because the soldiers had gumption. . . . I am talking about the most difficult thing: the mind. . . .”

Petryakov looked round at the wrecked buildings again, and Sergei saw that the General had kind, sad eyes.

Sergei recalled those eyes later, on his way back to his unit. Strange—a soldier, and yet he talked about what would be after the war. A German general could scarcely reason like that. Two worlds. . . . For the first time in his life Sergei felt the urge to write. You could not relate this in a letter, or in a newspaper article; you’d have to write an epic, a novel. He burst out laughing—a fine writer, indeed! Why, I can’t describe anything properly even to Mama. . . . No doubt they had writers on the army newspaper; they say that Simonov was here; Grossman wrote for the *Zvezda*; I saw him at the crossing. Perhaps they will write. . . . But it is difficult—you need peace and quiet for that. But will there be peace and quiet? . . . Horrible to think that it may all be forgotten, one thing eclipses another, I myself have forgotten a great deal. . . . How I arrived here with Zonin. In August. . . . Zonin said: “A nice adventure we’ve landed into.” . . . Yes, a sad adventure; those who figured in it have eyes like Petryakov’s. Not the stuff for a trashy novel. . . . It will make a magnificent story. If it is ever written it will be read even in a hundred years from now—how the son of a herdsman went to school, discovered stars, roots and numbers, then built a bridge across the Don, or worked at the Red October plant, and later defended this new, frail but eternal world, defended it here—on a tiny patch of ground—and died, and is now lying somewhere under the ruins. . . .”

Petryakov had told Sergei about the ultimatum. The Germans refused to surrender and so they had to be beaten into submission. Rashevsky came up:

“How stupid, Levin’s killed. . . . Balashkin has got the Fritzes in a tight corner, so they are banging away with mortars. . . . A stupid accident! What a pity! He was a good surgeon, he saved my leg. . . .”

Sergei was plunged into gloom. He had liked Levin. And it was stupid—to live through all these months and get killed right at the end. . . . But perhaps it only seems stupid? Levin’s son was killed long ago, when the Germans were still pushing forward. Why was it not stupid then? . . . Levin had read his son’s verses about the Volga, about the river being like grief. The river stopped flowing. And Levin was killed. Somebody will be killed even in the very last minute. . . . Levin must have felt it coming; the last time I saw him he said: “Things are going splendidly. I think this is the turning point.” He paused and then added: “My son was killed here, my brother was killed during the retreat, the Germans have no doubt killed my wife, she remained in Dnepropetrovsk. I can’t understand how I have survived! . . .”

The last few days had been big days indeed: the Germans were smoked out of the ruins, cellars were blown up, trenches were ploughed

up. "Katyushas" and mortars roared without end. Black smoke hovered over the snow-covered wreckage of houses. The din was so terrific that Shulyapov said: "It's like hell let loose. . . ."

Suddenly, silence ensued; it was so unusual that Sergei felt lost. Of course, there had been quiet hours before, but still, the sound of rifle shots could be heard, a machine gun rattled somewhere in the distance, the rumble of artillery was carried by the wind. But now the silence was thick and dense. At one stroke Stalingrad found itself far in the rear. The silence was stupefying, oppressive, prevented you from falling asleep.

Sergei walked down a street. Not a single house was left intact. . . . Balashkin had his "outfit" here. Two months they fought for this street. . . . Dead bodies, helmets, water bottles, rubble, barbed wire. . . .

He met many Germans; some were under escort, others were roaming about, not knowing where to go to get warm. They crawled out from under the ground and walked along staggering—from hunger, from the intoxicating effect of the sharp cold air after the stuffiness of their former quarters, from fear! The city seemed to be inhabited by field-grey shadows.

Sergei looked at them without hatred and without pity. The Germans were still in the heart of Russia, they were still ruling Europe, but now, amidst the sudden stillness of Stalingrad, which, though dead, had triumphed, they no longer looked like men, they looked like phantoms.

"Did you ever imagine that it could be so quiet?" Sergei asked Major Shileiko.

The Major was fond of arguing; when anybody said that there had never been such heavy gunfire, or such heavy bombing before, he would always answer: "I've seen worse. . . ." This time he did not argue. He answered:

"Simply unheard of. . . ."

He was sitting in his "cave" and smiling; even his gramophone was silent. As always, the little signals girl Varya was on duty at the telephone. Shileiko pointed to her and smiled again—Varya was asleep. This was the first time she could sleep calmly; the telephone had ceased to be an instrument of fate, whose buzz meant that German tanks would appear or that German tommy gunners were creeping up. . . . Varya was a frail-looking, pale-faced girl, with wise, sad eyes. The Major had once told Sergei that she had been a student, and that her parents and younger brother had died from starvation in Leningrad. Sergei looked at the sleeping girl and smiled too.

"Let her have a good sleep. . . ."

Sergei wrote to Valya: "You must know how much I love you. Don't be jealous of the past, or of anything you or I may imagine. I am unfaithful in my dreams, but not in real life. At present our lives are

awfully simple and hard. If only love could be like that—simple and hard! This is a big day for us, and the first thing I wanted to do was to write to you about how it will be when the war is over. I thought about this for the first time two weeks ago; to tell the truth, it was our General who suggested this thought to me. I try to picture to myself how silence will set in everywhere. I once wrote to you about Voronov, do you remember? Before he was killed he said that we would have to rebuild the bridge across the Don, he foresaw our offensive. I am now thinking about the bridges which we will build later on. Perhaps my dreams are premature, the war is not over yet, not by a long way. I am also thinking of the moment when we shall meet again. To me, your love is a bridge to a new, a second life. Forgive me for writing so disjointedly; you may think it strange, but the silence has stunned me. Keep well, and don't worry about me, things will go easier now."

The men were sitting at a campfire. Shulyapov was reading haltingly: "Posted third of January. Good afternoon, or good evening, dear Vanyusha. First of all I want to tell you that I am alive and well, and wish you the same, but Mitya died like a hero. When the notification came, Father did not say anything; I could not stop crying, but he kept silent, and in the evening he went to bed and said he could not move."...

Shulyapov coughed from the smoke and moved away from the fire.

Stiff feet and hands were stretched towards the fire. Darkness set in. An infantryman was saying:

"I saw the generals crawling out. They had their hands up. Very tame.... Later on the interpreter told us that one general was very angry, stamped his foot and shouted—they had taken his razor away for fear he would commit suicide—and he wanted to shave. Why should he want to commit suicide? He is glad..."

The men round the fire laughed good-naturedly. Shulyapov swore and said:

"The skunk! Now he is glad, but how many people has he killed?"

After that the men kept quiet, enjoying the silence; they seemed to be gorging it, couldn't have enough of it.

Shulyapov went up to Sergei and said:

"So it's victory, Comrade Major!..."

This unusual word came like a shock to Sergei. Yes, this was not merely a successful engagement, not a stroke of luck, it was victory!

He recalled the statue in the Louvre. Every time he had visited the museum he had gone to look at it. It had seemed to him that Victory was flying straight at him.... Headless, no face, no arms, only wings.... That had been very long ago, peace reigned then, Mado, the bench under the chestnut tree.... Or perhaps all this had never been, perhaps it was a dream, an old yellow-backed novel?...

Why do people think that Victory flies? It is not true. Her feet are chafed and bleeding, she crawls in the mud and in the snow, creeps

into bomb slits. Her body is covered with wounds, she is weary and shivering with cold. . . . She probably resembles the little signals girl in Major Shileiko's dugout. Varya, I think her name is. . . . Yes, she must be like that—bedraggled, but Victory none the less. There! She has come up to the sappers, has sat down by the fire. She feels cold. But the fire has burnt out, only a few glowing embers, a little of human warmth. . . .

* 24 *

Keller lived in torment all day long—he could not screw up his courage to go out to the Russians. He knew that resistance was over and that everybody was surrendering, but he was afraid to go up to a Russian and say: "Kaputt! . . ." He had lost the men of his company the day before, when the Reds reached their trench. Stellbrecht was firing his tommy gun. Schmidt was lying with a bullet in his head. Keller had managed to get away and hide in the ruins of a house. He had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours. He picked up a handful of snow, as hard as stone, and sucked it. He had a frightful toothache. He turned over in his mind many different ways of addressing the Russians; he would say: "I didn't kill anybody," or: "I am not a Nazi. I was compelled to fight," or: "I am a scientist, an anthropologist." But none of these formulae sounded convincing to him. Suddenly he recalled that in Moghilev he had caught an old woman who was hiding in a garret. He had seen at once that she was a Jewess. He had not killed her, he had merely dragged her down into the street; it was Wergau who killed her. . . . If he were to say: "I did not kill anybody," the Russian would ask: "Were you in Moghilev? . . ." But that's absurd, who could know about that? Moghilev is in our hands. . . . But still, he was afraid. . . . They would interrogate him, they would find out that he had been in the good books of his superiors, that he was a Non-Com; they wouldn't believe that Klitsch had found mistakes in his book. . . . God, what harm had he done? Why should he die like a dog behind a fence? . . . Was he to blame for the age we were now living in? In the nineteenth century he would have turned out to be an excellent scientist. . . . He was conscripted. They had been obliged to fight because of the Versailles diktat, and then the Marxists united with the plutocracy. But if he were to say this to the Russians they would tear him limb from limb. . . . How cold it was! His eyes ached, his feet were numbed. His fingers were so stiff that he couldn't unbutton his pants. . . . This is certainly an unprecedented disaster—our forces are at Leningrad, in Africa, but they have not come here, they have abandoned us! Perhaps they will come, but too late. . . . I shall freeze to death in a minute. . . . But I don't want to die! . . .

He got up, reached the street through a breach in the wall, fell into a shell hole, picked himself up, stepped on a dead body and, no longer

realizing what he was doing, pushed open the door of a dugout. He felt unusually warm. He wanted to say that he had not killed anybody and that he was freezing, but all the excuses he had thought of before simply flew out of his head. He merely breathed audibly, as if something was gripping his throat. A little woman was sitting at a table reading a book by the light of a small kerosene lamp. On catching sight of the German she shrieked and then rushed at him. She pushed him, but he resisted. The girl was stronger than he, however; she threw him out into the snow and shut the door.

Keller made no attempt to get up; he realized that he was dying. His thoughts were confused. His lips moved—he swore, swore at the girl who had thrown him out, he swore at the Russians, at Stellbrecht, at the Nazis. If only he could get up, gather all his strength and hang that chit of a girl! . . . Make her jerk. . . . Why did they send me to Russia? . . . A great scientist was perishing. . . . Confused reflections arose in his mind. He saw Mimi, but she was in Heidelberg, and for some reason she was grinding coffee; and Rudi was taking aim at her with a toy gun. Poor Rudi, he will be an orphan. . . . Who is to blame for all this? The Führer is shouting “get up!” No, it is not the Führer, it is Oberleutnant Krause, and Keller convulsively wriggled his stiff legs. But Krause was killed. . . . Keller groped in the snow with his hand, it seemed to him that Gerda was lying beside him, plump and warm: she whispered to him: “Naughty boy, what did you do with Mimi? With that red-haired girl in Kharkov? . . .” The fat bitch is awfully jealous. Shall I swear at her? But she may leave me, and it’s so warm with her here. . . . He no longer felt cold. What does she want? Kiss and cuddle? Nothing doing! He was very tired, he had walked all the way from Heidelberg to the camels, all he wanted was to sleep, only to sleep. Who is that howling? . . . A dog? The wind? Those damned Russians, they never let you fall asleep! . . . But I will fall asleep. . . .

After ejecting the German, Varya sat down to her book again. It was a small volume of Turgenev that she had found in the dugout. The last pages of the book were missing, and she was dying to know whether the hero caught up with Asya. She assumed that he married her and that they were happy. Gagin didn’t understand anything. . . . Nor did Rozovsky utter a “single word,” but Varya knew everything without words. . . .

Suddenly a feeling of uneasiness overcame her; she put on her sheepskin jacket and went out. It was a bright, frosty night. A dead German was lying near the dugout; she recognized him at once: it was the one she had thrown out. . . . Frozen to death. To hell with him! . . . But why did I throw him out? . . .

She went in again, lay down on her cot and began to cry. In Stalin-grad she had not cried once, not even when she heard of the death of her parents and little seven-year-old Petya. Her aunt had written and

had told her the whole truth: Petya had died from stomach trouble; he was starving and had probably picked up and eaten something that was bad for him. Her father died in February; her mother had not the strength to bury him, the neighbours had gone away, so her father had lain dead in the house for four days. When the aunt came, her mother was no longer able to get up.

Varya wept over the death of all her near and dear ones. Lieutenant Rozovsky was killed in November. She had nowhere to go, no one to write to. . . . She wept because of the unusual silence that had set in, the battle of Stalingrad was over; and she wept because it seemed to her that the war would never end, and because she had thrown that lousy Fritz out of the dugout. . . .

When Marusya came in and enquired: "What are you blubbering for?" she could not explain, she said nothing about her dear ones, nor about Rozovsky, nor about her terrible loneliness.

"A Fritz came in and I threw him out. And he froze to death. He is lying right outside, you must have seen him. . . ."

"So what of it? I hope it's not him you are sorry for."

"Him? No. He had an awful mug, like the rotters they draw on the posters. . . . I am sorry for myself. . . . The wicked scoundrels, what they have only done to me! . . . But why didn't I let him in? . . . I hate them! They not only kill, they do worse things. . . . How could you, think that I am sorry for him? I don't feel anything about him, not anything, and that's the most terrible thing about it. . . ."

She expected Marusya to make fun of her. Marusya was a jolly girl, she had not lost any of her relatives, she had met an artilleryman here, and it looked as though they were happy. She was good-looking, sound in health and never moped. Let her laugh, it's all the same to me. . . . But Marusya did not laugh, she sat down beside Varya and burst into tears herself, why she did not know—probably because Varya was crying.

"That's enough," said Varya. "Somebody may come in. . . . The chief thing is that here it is all over. . . . Now for Berlin, as quickly as possible! . . ."

* 25 *

Maria Mikhailovna Minayeva had received the last letter from her son in the middle of January. He had sent his mother New Year greetings, had written that this would indeed be a new year, he had asked her not to worry about him because he was "at the back, and everything will be all right now." Had his comrades read Minayev's letter to his "mum," they would probably have been astounded—they would never have believed that this confirmed jester could be so affectionate. But Maria Mikhailovna was not surprised, she knew Mitenka's heart; but

she did not believe a word he wrote—even if he were dying he would write to me and say: "I am living as peacefully as if I were in the country" (that is, in fact, what he wrote when his battalion was defending the mound against the Germans).

Maria Mikhailovna had devoted her whole life to her son. She had married late; her husband had been a tailor's cutter and had earned good money. They rejoiced when a daughter was born to them and made a great fuss over her, but Nastenka died of scarlet fever. Maria Mikhailovna was thirty-nine when she became pregnant again. She was afraid to move for fear of doing the baby harm. . . . Mitya was born in nineteen eighteen; times were hard and disturbed then. Maria Mikhailovna lived in constant fear that he would catch cold, or contract some infectious disease. . . . Her husband died when Mitya was eight years old. Maria Mikhailovna went to work in a co-operative tailors' workshop. She brought her son up, put him on his feet, as it were, and when Mitenka told her: "Professor Nikodimov has given a favourable report about my work," she knew that she had not lived in vain.

Then the war broke out. Mitenka went away on the sixth of July. What tears Maria Mikhailovna shed in her tiny room! . . . She was aware that she had no right to complain—it was hard for everybody; she kept calm in the presence of other people and wrote cheerful letters to her son. She wanted to work, to help the armed forces, but her age prevented her from doing much. Still, she found a way of doing her bit: she took work home, sewed shirts for the soldiers. She was grateful to Mitenka—just before the war he had insisted upon her going to the eye hospital, and there they had fitted her with a good pair of eyeglasses. She was able to work even at night by the feeble light of a kerosene lamp. She felt that she was helping Mitenka, and this consoled her. When, one day, the house manager referred to her as a "dependant" she was offended. "I am a homemaker now, and I am working for the army," she retorted. She had a sewing machine, so old that Mitya had called it a "museum piece." Maria Mikhailovna smiled and thought to herself: old, but still of some use, like myself. . . .

Maria Mikhailovna lived in a communal apartment which, after one of the regular floods (the roof leaked every spring) Mitya had called "Noah's ark." The apartment was congested, like an overcrowded train, but this train travelled not days, but years. The room next to Minayeva's belonged to a family named Parshin. The room was locked up now—the husband was away at the war, and his wife and children had gone to live in Barnaul. On the other side lived the Katzmans—father, mother and their mischievous boy Grisha. Grisha had graduated from high school in nineteen forty-one; in the autumn of that year he was called up for the army, and in April he was killed on the Brvansk Front. Katzman now lived alone; his wife went with a school when it was evacuated. He was a proofreader and worked on a newspaper. He

was ten years younger than Maria Mikhailovna, but he looked an old man. When he received the notification of the death of his son he said nothing about it either to his neighbours or to his fellow workers at the printing office; he went to work and overlooked a printer's error, the sub-editor scolded him for this, but Katzman did not tell even him the cause of this slip. Several weeks later, when Maria Mikhailovna happened to ask him whether he had heard anything about Grisha, he bent over towards her and whispered: "Grisha is dead."... The room next to Katzman's was occupied by the Kovalyovs; in nineteen forty-one they had gone with the evacuees, but had returned the next summer. Irina Petrovna worked at the State Bank, her daughter Natasha was still at school, and her son Vasya was in the navy. Irina Petrovna related that he had been decorated for sinking a German transport. Whenever anybody mentioned the word "navy" she pricked up her ears in alarm. The end room was occupied by a young woman, Shurochka Volkova, who worked at the Ball Bearing Plant. Shura had married just before the war; her husband was in the tanks. One day she related with mixed feelings of admiration and horror: "He is in his fourth tank—the tanks couldn't stand it, but he's alive, he was only slightly wounded in the last battle."...

Before the war there had been noisy quarrels in the apartment. The Parshins loudly complained that Shurochka made a mess all over the place; Irina Petrovna would be annoyed because Katzman came home from his printing office just before dawn, and she was such a light sleeper; and Parshin's wife would say that the Katzmans did not know how to bring up their son who was a perfect "devil." Now nobody quarrelled, although the nerves of all of them were strained and life was hard—the house was unheated and there was nothing to buy in the market. The lives of all of them were bound up with the "plate," the disc radio receiver in the corridor, and when the announcer said "from the Soviet Inform Bureau," every voice in the apartment was hushed. Everybody was glad when one of them received a letter, and Katzman, who had nothing to expect, livened up because yesterday Shura had received a letter from her husband, because Mitva was alive and well, because Kovalyova's son had received a second decoration. In the privacy of their own rooms they wept, grieved and suffered, but when they met, they repeated words of hope or consolation.

Katzman had not been to work for three nights: the doctor said he had a severe attack of bronchitis. He coughed very loudly, and the walls were thin. In the past somebody would have sworn at him under his breath for disturbing his sleep.... But now, on hearing his dry cough, everybody remembered how he had scolded shock-headed Grisha for fighting with other boys and for losing his school book.... Maria Mikhailovna took from her cupboard a basin of sugar broken into very small pieces, put a large heap of sugar into a cup, filled the cup with

tea and took it to Katzman: "Drink this, David Grigoryevich," she said, "It's sweet, it will relieve you at once." . . .

She was asleep when, in the middle of the night, the "plate" suddenly began to emit hoarse sounds. She threw on her jacket and ran into the corridor. All the neighbours were there, even sick Katzman had crawled out of his bed.

"Last hour news. . . The liquidation of the German-fascist forces is now complete. . . The historic battle of Stalingrad has ended in a complete victory for our forces. . ."

Maria Mikhailovna strained her ears to the utmost, fearing to lose a single word; she did not realize that tears were streaming from her eyes. "Lord, is it really true? . . . Victory!" Then she went up to Katzman and said: "David Grigoryevich, I want to kiss you, may I? At a moment like this! . . ." Shurochka clapped her hands like a little child and kept repeating:

"Twenty-four generals—two dozen! . . ."

Exclamations of joy were heard from the other apartments in the house. Somebody applauded. Natasha Kovalyova ran into the street and came back with a beaming face:

"The crowds in the street! Everybody is congratulating and kissing everybody else. . ."

Maria Mikhailovna thought to herself: "Like Easter. . ."

Early in the morning she was already sitting at her sewing machine. Natasha Kovalyova came in:

"Maria Mikhailovna, can't you take a rest even on a day like this? . . ."

Maria Mikhailovna shook her head:

"Are they resting out there? Mitenka must have gone on further. . . I'll rest later on, when it's all over. . ."

"It will soon be over now."

"Sooner said than done. They have a long way to go yet—to Berlin" (in saying "Berlin" Maria Mikhailovna always put the emphasis on the first syllable, and when her son corrected her one day, she said: "I can't help it, it comes out that way.")).

She wrote to her son: "Mitenka, I heard the 'last hour news' yesterday. I am glad those murderers have surrendered, but I cannot forgive them for having killed so many innocent people. David Grigoryevich listened to the report and cried. Nobody will bring Grisha back to him. Tell me, when will those scoundrels be made to answer for the tears we old folks are shedding?"

During the past two years Paul had seen a great deal, he had been in Limoges, Brive and Toulouse. At first he worked in the Jaurès group; they had no arms, so they printed leaflets, and they set fire to a flour warehouse. They were betrayed by the wife of a member of the group: she had gone mad with jealousy. Paul had managed to hide. Then he got into the Gabriel Péri group: he loosened railroad ties, laid mines, crouched in narrow gulleys waiting for trains; laughingly he would say: "When the war's over I'll become a railwayman." He was now charged with the task of organizing a new group. He was waiting for a man from the centre to whom he was to report, and from whom he was to receive instructions.

Lejean would not have recognized his son—on the eve of the war Paul was a shy and therefore rather rude lad who spoke in a voice that was a mixture of a squeak and a bass; he was simultaneously interested in cycle racing, Spain and poetry, talked about the evil designs of the imperialists and was unable to discard the hobbies of his childhood—he collected postage stamps, bought penknives, dreamed of life in a tent; he blushed at the sight of a pretty girl, but assured his chums that "only an idiot could be fascinated by a woman." Both his father and Josette had regarded him as a child. When the catastrophe came Paul was in his last term at college. He went to work on a farm and tended cows. Later a friend of his got him a job in Limoges; in the daytime he helped an apothecary's wife to dispense medicines and at night he distributed leaflets.

He developed quickly, and his tastes and character took definite shape. He did not acquire his father's stern character—even in his youth Lejean had astonished people by his stubbornness. Paul was mild and extremely sensitive, a feature which he concealed by assumed irony. His friends called him the "poet," although he never wrote poetry, he only recited sometimes. Even during those frightful moments when he was running from the police he could admire a tree against the background of the pale green sky, or a sleepy rivulet with yellow water lilies; he recited scraps of poetry because he was unable to express his feelings; he carefully concealed from his friends the fact that he was in love with a certain Jeannette who preferred a good dancer to all poets and partisans. When his longing for Jeannette became exceptionally acute he would murmur:

*And the roses along the path
Refuted the wind of death....*

"What silly stuff is that?" Grammont asked him.

"A poem by Aragon. He is a Communist, and he writes poetry. Nothing surprising about that."

"I prefer novels," answered Grammont.

"It's the times we are living in. . . . Novels are all right with a soft armchair and a calm evening. Poems go with bombs. . . ."

"Why don't you write poetry yourself?"

"Probably because bombs don't go with poetry. I am busy, like you, blowing up German trains."

Callot, the comrade from the centre, a metal worker, about fifty years of age, looked Paul up and down distrustfully.

"Are you handling the job? You look rather young for a job like this. How old are you?"

"Yes, I'm handling it, even though I am younger than Pétain," answered Paul with a smile. (He deemed it superfluous to say that he had turned twenty a month ago.)

He gave a detailed report of what they had done since November: they had derailed a train near la Butte, wrecked two locomotives, set fire to an army boot warehouse, purloined bread ration cards for the whole underground organization, killed two German army officers and a French policeman, and had executed the traitor Dumay.

"Not bad for a start. The Germans are saying that the terroristic acts are being committed by 'malevolent individuals.' In future our operations must bear more of a mass character. What are your plans?"

"The Café Royal. German officers gather there."

"Not bad. But don't forget about transport. That's very important just now."

Callot described the situation. The labour mobilization decree which had been issued the week before would cause an influx into the ranks of the partisans. Within a month or two it would be possible to organize maquis. Small groups already existed in the mountains, and in the spring the movement would be extended. . . .

"What's the name of your group, Marseillaise?"

"No, the Marseillaise is where Dufy is; we carried out the ration card operation with them."

"What's the name of your group then?"

"Stalingrad."

"That's a name that commits you to much. . . ."

In the train Callot recalled his conversation with Paul and thought to himself: a good lad. Callot had devoted all his life to Party work. He did not know where his wife and son were at the present moment and tried not to think about them. Paul reminded him of his son: my boy is eighteen. . . . Perhaps he too is fighting. . . . Those people say "wait." . . . But how can we wait? Surrender boys like these to the Germans? . . . If you try to save everything you are bound to lose. . . . The Russians did not hesitate to sacrifice Stalingrad and they won the battle, won the war, one may say. . . . Yes, he's a good lad is that one. . . .

Paul gleefully reported to Grammont:

"He approved of the Royal job. We must not neglect transport. In a month or two we shall have—maquis. . . ."

"Maquis," that word seemed wonderful to him; it conjured up the smell of heather, of wild rose and the South. Before the war the last of the brigands had hidden in the maquis of Corsica, in the dense, prickly bush. The real brigands sat in quiet ollices and nobody thought about maquis. Now that word had revived. Maquis here, in the heart of France. . . .

"The maquis will draw tens of thousands, you will see. Nobody wants to go to Germany, and it is hard to hide in the towns. And besides—this means real war. The maquis. . . ."

Grammont burst out laughing:

"Do you think everybody is as romantic as you? Maquis means—mud, rain, snow. . . ."

"You have forgotten—it means calloused feet and lice. . . ."

"It means winter in the forest. . . ."

"And it means victory in the summer. . . ."

The Café Royal was situated in the main shopping street, which was crowded from morning till night. At five in the afternoon the café was filled with German army officers. The French did not frequent it. The plan of operations was drawn up by Paul, Grammont and Bibi, whom Paul jestingly called the "Chief of Staff"—Bibi had been at the front in nineteen forty. They had a long argument about who should throw the hand grenades into the café. Paul had insisted that he should do it ("I'll be very accurate"). In the end they adopted Bibi's plan. He was an excellent cyclist; they decided that he would cycle past the café and throw a grenade into the glass-covered terrace. Grammont and Joseph would take advantage of the ensuing panic and each throw another grenade. Paul and seven other members of the group would cover the retreat and fire at the Germans if they attempted to pursue the assailants. Paul would be in command; he would assign each one to his post and give Bibi the signal—raise a newspaper. Grammont and Joseph were to wait in a small café opposite the Royal. Paul would take up his post at the tram stop at the corner of the street. Louise would maintain communication.

Bibi raced past the café. Paul was standing at the street corner reading a newspaper (Joseph and Grammont were late). After riding for about two kilometres Bibi turned back, made a detour and ten minutes later was outside the Café Royal again. Paul raised his newspaper. Bibi hurled his grenade and dashed on; it seemed as though he was lying on his handlebars. He heard an explosion and shots. He did not think of anything; his legs did the thinking. He came to himself in the saddler's workshop where he was to spend the night. He could not close his eyes, thinking: what had become of Grammont and Joseph? Who did the

shooting? Did they all get away? The saddler was sick in bed and knew nothing. Louise was not expected until the morning. When she appeared Bibi shouted:

"Did they get away?"

She shook her head reprovingly:

"A nice conspirator, you are! Yes, they all got away. Only Paul was hurt, but he managed to pass his revolver to Jacques.... Eight Boches were killed in the café, three were wounded. Charlot shot two Germans and a policeman. Paul killed, or wounded, a Boche when they chased Grammont."

"Where's Paul?"

"In the hospital. He had no arms on him, and his papers are all right. Two others were taken in—passers-by.... Claire has been to the hospital, she said she was Paul's fiancée. The head doctor was very polite; either he does not suspect, or he is a sympathizer.... They said that Paul had been accidentally injured as he was walking out of a shop.... The wound is serious, but the doctor says there is hope...."

Paul was operated on in the morning. He recovered consciousness about midday. He had fired at a German who was about to start his car—that he distinctly remembered.... Then he had a vague recollection of Jacques running up to him and taking his revolver.... He was extremely worried about the others: did they get away? ... Claire came to see him and talked a lot of nonsense about how much she loved him, about getting married soon, and then, bending towards him she whispered: "All have got away. Fourteen Boches and a policeman. The doctor here is a very decent fellow, he won't give you away." ...

They've got away! ... Paul felt relieved at once. His wound began to ache very painfully (he had felt no pain up to now). The nurse adjusted his blanket and said to him softly: "There is a German in the next bed to yours. He was wounded yesterday too...." Paul could not see the German's face, but he heard regular groans coming from the next bed. Then he forgot about the German. A vision of Jeannette hovered before his eyes, she had a bunch of Parma violets pinned to her breast and she was singing a sentimental song:

*Amidst the storm I'd like to have
A little spot of azure sky,
A little bit of love....*

Then Mama played Bach on the piano. He heard the rustling of the treetops in the forest—those are the maquis. And in the summer we'll achieve victory. Father is in command of the maquisards. Strange—the bed is floating on a river, it is rocking like a boat.... What a lot of water lilies! ... And Ophelia ... Jeannette, don't go away! ...

Day dawned. He was frightened at the sight of the beds and the patients. Then he remembered: he was in the hospital. The nurse put the thermometer under his arm. The doctor said: "The main thing is to keep quiet."... Suddenly he realized that he would live. His wound ached, but his mind was clear. For a moment he regretted that he had emerged from the state of semioblivion he had been in for two nights and a day—he would not be able to dream any more; he thought to himself: I wonder how long I shall be laid up here? Will Grammont be able to cope with the work?...

Turning his head, he saw the German. Their eyes met. The German's were blue and mild. The German uttered a shriek, evidently his wound had begun to hurt. The nurse hastened to his bed. Paul dozed. In his sleep he heard visitors—two of them—they had come to see the German. They soon went away. Paul opened his eyes, he expected Claire, she had promised faithfully to come.

A couple of Germans forced their way into the ward, grabbed hold of Paul and dragged him downstairs. The nurse screamed:

"Good Lord, what are you doing?"

"Heinz recognized this fellow..."

The head doctor pleaded with the Germans:

"Put a guard over him... Let us heal him first..."

A German pushed him aside and said with a sneer:

"We'll do the healing now. You heal Heinz."

Paul again plunged into semioblivion: he vaguely felt that he was being dragged, pushed into something or other and taken out. He had lost a lot of blood. Evidently an attempt was made to interrogate him, but the questions failed to reach his mind. He was calm, except for the lines of a poem that buzzed in his head like gnats round a lamp on a summer night:

*And the roses along the path
Refuted the wind of death....*

There was a profusion of roses on the hedges, around the arbours, roses were interwoven with the years, in Jeannette's hair, overflowed into their apartment, they were on Mama's piano, they lost their petals and bloomed again—a path of roses—lemon, tea, pale-pink and dark red, like the colour of congealed blood. He died amidst roses, without recovering consciousness, on the stone, saliva-bespattered floor.

Jeannette said to Grammont: "I shall go mad! He had no confidence in me, he thought I was only fond of pleasure, but I can't live without him. I want to avenge him, give me a revolver..." Grammont answered: "All right. Wait..." Three weeks later Jeannette was dancing with a young Brazilian engineer and she was saying to him: "Oh, how I want to enjoy life! I am fed up with the war. I would give anything for just one night in Rio de Janeiro!..."

Grammont wrote a leaflet which the lads scattered throughout the town:

"Fourteen Boches and a policeman have been executed. The war is flaring up. From now on, not a single Boche will tread the soil of France in peace. We swear by the honour of the city whose name our group has adopted. We swear by the memory of our gallant Comrade Paul who perished during the attack on the Café Royal. Death to the Boches! Long live liberty!

F.T.P. Stalingrad Group."

* 27 *

Marie's face beamed—Professor Duma was unrecognizable; he ate two platefuls of onion soup with great zest and said the soup was "exceptionally good," then put on his coat and went for a stroll. Hitherto, however much Marie had urged him to go out and get a breath of fresh air, he had refused. "There is no more fresh air here," he would say. "Everything stinks of them." . . . But today he himself had said:

"I'll go out and see what's doing in town. It's a pleasure to look at them now. Let them strut. . . . They'll all be in their coffins soon."

Although Dumas had explained to Marie what had happened at Stalingrad at least ten times, she put down the change in the professor's mood to her prayers. She had been greatly grieved by the fact that he never went out, scarcely ate anything and was constantly smoking; and Dr. Morillot said: "His heart is a bit off the mark." . . . Every Sunday she had prayed to the Virgin Mary to save the professor. Of course, she did not tell Dumas about this, she knew that he would laugh at her. There was nothing funny about it, although he was a professor, he did not understand these things. . . .

Dumas was pleased with everything: the fresh, clear air, the children romping on the pavement, and the old man who was taking his bald-patched dog for a walk. On passing the church where Marie prayed for him every Sunday he saw a crowd of people outside—German army officers, policemen, gentlemen dressed in black, "grey mice," and Frenchwomen. Evidently it was the funeral of some important German. . . . The dead German had shown great wisdom, that could not be denied: he did not wait for his historical nemesis. . . . Dumas enquired of the idle spectators on the church steps:

"Whose funeral is it?"

Somebody answered:

"It's a memorial service for the European defenders of Stalingrad."

Dumas did not read the newspapers, he obtained his information about events from the London and Moscow radio broadcasts; conse-

quently, the words "European defenders" amused him exceedingly. Barely restraining himself from laughing, he said amiably:

"Not the European, but the German defenders, I suppose. I, for example, am also a European to some extent, and General Rokossovsky is neither an Asiatic nor an American...."

He proceeded on his way, cheerfully puffing at his pipe and thinking: I'd like to have a look, just now, at that wretched colleague of mine! I told him it would end badly for them.... They will yet come begging of us to intercede for them in the name of "science... civilization... humanity."... The way a man develops has been described ever so many times; it would be interesting to describe how he suddenly drops into stupidity....

This was the first time Dumas had left his house after two months of sickness and moping. He decided to look up Léo. When he got to the house the concierge stopped him:

"They have gone away.... Some people came for Monsieur Alpert. The day before yesterday they came again and enquired whether I knew where he was...."

"What the hell! They hold memorial services for themselves, and yet they want the blood of a respectable man. The vampires!"

The concierge trembled with fright:

"Hush, for God's sake! There are people living in this house who it were better if they did not live at all...."

Of Dumas' good humour not a trace was now left. He fumed; he felt like rushing at the first German he met and throwing him into the Seine without waiting for the judgment of history.

From the embankment he turned down an old narrow side-street and his eyes caught the word "Stalingrad" which somebody had chalked on the wall. He chuckled: Everybody sees that they are done for.... Léo got away in time.... Those gentlemen will slam the door hard when they leave.... Anna has not been to see me for a long time. I hope nothing has happened.... If only they would land soon. It's very good that they have captured Tripoli, but Paris deserves a thought too.... The Germans will never recover after Stalingrad, that was a general rehearsal.... A nice house, this; three hundred years old, no less. Here a sceptic in a wig read the latest book, *Candide*. The Jacobins vowed: "Liberty or death." And yet the Nazis wanted to convert a city like this into a café-chantant for their soldiery!... Dumas saw another inscription "Stalingrad" chalked on a fence. Somebody had written the word on all the house fronts, on all the fences. Mene, Tekel, Upharsin—numbered, weighed and divided....

The professor returned home in an excellent humour and told Marie about all he had heard and seen. She was doubtful about the propriety of making fun of a religious service, but Dumas laughed so infectiously that she had to smile.

Dumas dropped into an armchair, wrapped himself in a blanket (there was no coal in the house) and decided to reread *Penguin Island*. Every now and again, as he read, he laughed loudly, and at each outburst Marie, who was knitting in the next room, gave a start. The professor is recovering, she thought to herself, and happy, she fell asleep.

There was a ring at the door. Dumas glanced wonderingly at the clock: it was half past eleven. . . . He opened the door. Two Germans entered—a lieutenant and a sergeant. A nimble-looking plain-clothes man in a fawn overcoat, rather light for the season, darted in between them. The policeman enquired:

"Does Monsieur Dumas live here?"

"I am Dumas. . . ."

They began to search the place. Marie was in tears. Dumas calmly smoked his pipe as if the proceedings did not concern him in the least. The lieutenant looked on; the sergeant and the policeman did the work. When they came to the bookshelves they stopped in perplexity—you couldn't inspect these even in a week. . . .

"You've got too much reading junk," said the policeman angrily.

Dumas shrugged his shoulders:

"It's my profession. Strange as it may seem to you, I am not a 'tec, I am a professor."

The sergeant glanced at Dumas in astonishment and began to address him as "Herr Professor." This riled the lieutenant. He said:

"In our country professors like you clean latrines."

Dumas yawned and watched the short, fat sergeant climb on to a stool and throw the books down from the upper shelves. The dust tickled his nostrils.

For some reason the professor irritated the lieutenant. An old clown! . . . That was exactly how he had pictured Frenchmen from caricatures—untidy, dusty, jeers at everything, imagines he is a scientist and dares to go against a country which gave the world Leibnitz and Kant.

While dragging down the hefty tomes of an old encyclopaedia, the sergeant lost his balance and fell down. Dumas burst out laughing.

"You'll laugh the other side of your face soon," said the lieutenant. "You will have sufficient leisure to ponder over your own insignificance and the might of Germany."

"I have pondered over that enough," answered Dumas. And to his own surprise he enquired: "Tell me, did you attend that memorial service for yourself? . . ."

"What do you mean?"

"Your people held a memorial service for so-called 'Europeans' today, so I am asking. . . ."

The lieutenant yelled:

"Take him away, Weber! Richard will finish the search. . . ."

Marie grabbed hold of the policeman (she was afraid of the Germans):

"What are you doing? The professor is sick, he went out for the first time today. . . . He has a weak heart, you can ask Dr. Morillot. . . ."

Dumas smiled.

"Pack some underclothing for me, Marie. I may not need it, but in case. And don't grieve. Had they taken me in the autumn I would have grieved myself, but now I am quite calm. . . ."

"Where are you taking him to? He's sick!" shrieked Marie.

Dumas embraced her.

"Everything will be all right. Only don't grieve. . . ."

When they took Dumas away the policeman remained in the apartment—he had to finish the search. Marie asked him:

"Where are you from, Marseilles?"

He answered reluctantly:

"No. From Toulouse."

"And aren't you ashamed of yourself? Where did your mother give birth to you, in Toulouse or in Berlin?"

"Shut up, or I'll take you to the lockup too."

Marie wept copious tears. Suddenly she remembered what the professor had told her about Stalingrad: there so many Boches were killed that you couldn't count them; well, yes, the professor knew how many, he had told her, but she had forgotten; at any rate, quite a lot. And a good job too. They all deserve to be wiped out; especially that little officer. How dared he yell at the professor? Marie began to pray. She had never prayed like that before. She realized that it was a sin, but still she kept on repeating: "Lord, cause them all to perish! Lord, may that rascal be killed tomorrow! Lord, may it be in Paris as it was in Stalingrad!"

Thinking that he would be interrogated, Dumas prepared his answers. Perhaps they had been informed that he was opposed to the persecution of the Jews, perhaps they had heard him on the staircase at Léo's house, or perhaps Nivelle informed against him? He would say: "I don't deny it. I am an anthropologist, and your theory is utter piffle. Just now I am sorry I am not a Jew—you have converted the yellow star into a badge of martyrdom." But perhaps they had been informed about what he had said on the church steps that day? In that case he would say: "Henry the Fourth said that Paris was worth a mass; evidently Hitler thinks that Stalingrad is worth a memorial service." . . .

A sleepy sergeant enquired: name, age, place of birth, profession? A girl in curls, thumping a typewriter, bawled: "Name. . . . Spell it." . . . Dumas was deprived of his fountain pen, watch and headache powders. They left him his pipe, but the German took his tobacco for himself. Later he was taken to the prison in Fresnes. The cell was dark. Dumas explored it. With difficulty he made out inscriptions on the walls, scratched with a pin or a fingernail. "I die for France, Jean Moutier,

19 November, 1942.” “Beware of Chartier—he is a traitor.” “Tell Madame Doriac in Blois that her son behaved as he should have done and that he embraces her before his death.” Dumas felt that he was not alone, that those who had perished were with him. Chartier? To hell with him! . . . But Moutier, or Doriac, they were real men. Since there are men like these, I am not afraid to die. . . .

Next morning Dumas heard a vague murmuring. He listened intently and gradually he distinguished separate words. Prisoners were talking to each other through the ventilator panes. This was prohibited, but people who were awaiting death were not daunted by fear of punishment. Dumas listened intently. Tiny was talking to René, Pierre was talking to Siskin, Serge was calling Cooper, but the latter did not answer. . . . What strange nicknames they had! . . . They told each other about the interrogations—Tiny was tortured again; they recalled the past: “Siskin, do you remember when we got lost in the forest?” They communicated important news to each other—Victor was shot; they must beware of Didi. . . . Dumas realized that all these men were bound together by a common task. He felt that he was an outsider and this made him sad. Later on he heard someone calling:

“Hey, new man! What name did you give when you were interrogated?”

“Professor Dumas.”

“Where were you arrested?”

“At home. I was sitting and reading when two Boches and a policeman came and threw all my books about.”

Silence ensued. Dumas felt offended: so if I don’t belong to their organization they must not talk to me? They ought to understand that since I am here I’m no rotter. . . .

“Professor! What’s the news outside?”

Dumas cheered up at once and told them all he knew about Stalingrad. The Germans had held a memorial service. Then he roared:

“They call themselves Europeans, those cretins! . . .”

“Not so loud! You must not shout. . . . But a memorial service—that’s really funny. . . .”

Distinctly he heard the word “Stalingrad” repeated over and over again. The professor’s story was being passed on from cell to cell.

Then silence reigned. A German entered Dumas’ cell, shouted “stand up” and struck the professor in the face. When the German left the cell Dumas covered his eyes with his hand and thought: so the days of trial have come. . . . He was old, his body might not be able to stand the test. He had this advantage however: he had studied himself. He knew he would not go down on his knees and beg for mercy. To him the Nazis were enormous insects. They could kill, but they could not degrade. . . .

“Professor! . . .”

He went to the window and listened intently.

"Professor, George is passing this on—he was a student and attended your lectures. He says he has been sentenced to be shot. He conveys his greetings.... Wait, he is saying more.... He says he is proud of the fact that you are here...."

"A good thing that lousy German is not here now," Dumas thought to himself. He would think he had brought me to tears.... I shall probably never know who that George is. He sat in my lecture room along with others.... He has been sentenced to be shot, and yet he conveys greetings, wants to cheer me up.... Here the butchers are powerless: they cannot condemn either to baseness or to dishonour....

"After all, the people are good at heart! They say that France has grown stale. There is truth in that. There is less unity, less strength, many have grown fat.... 'We, Philippe Pétain.'... Nivelle writes about Persephone.... A Chartier or a Didi is a traitor.... But how many are there like that? The French have one virtue—they are human. Yes, yes, we are human in heroism, in weakness, in eating, with women, and on the barricades. I have worked with Englishmen, with Norwegians, with Gomez. They may be neater, stronger, more gentlemanly, but we are more human. Whatever the fascists may write, there is such a thing as human dignity. That is why George awaits death calmly. Yes, and that is why I am here. And Marie might have been in my place.... The one who wrote 'Stalingrad' on the wall was not thinking of vengeance, not of revanche, not of glory, not of the conferences at which bargaining and bluffing, will go on after the war, but of dignity, and about the fact that man cannot be crushed with iron. The body can be crushed, but not the substance."

And Dumas' face lit up with such a smile of happiness that the German who stared at him through the spyhole thought to himself gloomily: the old boy has gone crazy with fear....

* 28 *

When, a month ago, Major Scheffler said to Schirke: "You overrate the importance of the fighting at Stalingrad," Schirke answered: "I don't like playing blindman's buff. In nineteen thirty-two the Catholics and Social-Democrats said that the importance of the Nazi victories must not be overrated. In nineteen thirty-eight the Paris newspapers wrote that Sudetenland was nothing compared with the combined might of France and Great Britain. We must look truth in the face. I have confidence in the Führer's genius. The coming months will be the test; up till now we have been conquering; now we must fight."...

The February communiqué stunned a good many, but not Schirke—he had been prepared for it. He was of the opinion that many of the Reichswehr commanders, while possessing knowledge and experience, lacked what he called "war nerve." Some of the generals regarded the

Führer as an upstart, a fortuitous figure; they lived in the past; they worshipped Army Regulations and entered a campaign loaded with academic formulae. Men like that thought that what was taking place now was a duel between two armies, as was the case in the nineteenth century, that there will be victors and vanquished, peace negotiations and compromise. Nonsense! The German nation has staked everything—it will be either the master or a slave. We have trained the young generation to be dynamic, bold and free from prejudices; even now, after the Stalingrad disaster, this young generation is capable of achieving victory. Only the army must be freed from the old intriguers, the soft bodies and the two-faced!

Schirke had not found it easy to work in France; he realized that it was necessary to manoeuvre, he had been amiable with Berty, had flattered Nivelles and was lavish with compliments and smiles. It was said that he had a bronze statuette of Jeanne d'Arc on his writing-desk. In his heart he detested the French. With a tremor in their voices they addressed him as "dear Monsieur Schirke," but they dreamed of hanging this Boche on a lamppost. . . . He was not deluded by the illusory calm. France had a squint—she had one eye looking west and the other looking east. They are ready to tear each other's throats, but one thing has united them—their enmity towards Germany. When Scheffer said in a tone of indignation: "These Frenchies are getting out of hand," because somebody had chalked the word "Stalingrad" on the wall of the house where he lived, Schirke laughed and said: "I hope it did not disturb your sleep." That Scheffer is probably shivering with fright. I shall not be surprised if he tries to save his skin at a critical moment. . . .

Schirke knew that he would never betray the Führer. Before he joined the movement his life had been dull and uninteresting. With the Führer he had learned the taste of victory, had sipped the wine of power. He despised human relationships that were based on ambiguities, on friendship, on the shifting sand of likes and dislikes. A man must either command or obey. Colonel Bayer gave orders to Schirke, Schirke gave orders to Jentsch, or to Forst.

He regarded himself as an idealist. One day his wife asked him whether it was true that in Poland they killed all the Jews, including children. He replied: "I don't know the details, another department deals with that, but I have been told that there are towns in the East which have already been purged of Jews. I know how cruel it is to liquidate children, but it is necessary—we must be able to tear out roots before we sow. In twenty years' time mankind will bless those whom the liberals now call butchers." . . . Frau Schirke said: "You are right." She always agreed with her husband on matters that did not affect her. But she was uncompromising in money matters. Schirke did not deny her anything, but she nagged him for living too extravagantly and not putting anything away for a rainy day. He tried to explain to her that

if a rainy day did come no savings would be of any use, but in vain. She retorted: "You must not be so selfish, you ought to think about me and Hans." Frau Schirke had done all in her power to keep her son out of politics, she had brought him up like a girl and later had introduced him to the pretty daughters of well-to-do people in the hope that they would do what she had failed to do. But the epoch proved to be stronger than Frau Schirke, and Hans, imbibing the ideas of his times, joined an S.S. division.

In the beginning of February Schirke received a letter from his wife. She wrote: "The unit to which Hans belongs is being sent to where you are. They say that it will be their task to repel an Allied landing. This is terrible. Why, they are all mere boys, like Hans! I feel I want to lay hands on myself." Schirke himself had more than once thought with horror: Hans will soon be sent to the front. His wife's letter made him glad—a good thing he is not being sent to Russia. . . . When the Allies will land nobody knows, and in any case fighting will not be so fierce here. . . . The boy is lucky. Schirke wrote to his wife: "Your complaints surprise me; all German mothers are in the same situation. Had our Hans been one of the defenders of Stalingrad we would have been proud that we had given the Fatherland and the Führer a hero."

He looked forward to seeing his son soon, but it was not to be. It was a windy February day. Schirke was having lunch with Pinaud. He regretted that Berty was dead; it had been interesting to have an argument with him. . . . Pinaud did not argue; he said drily: "The manufacturers are quite satisfied, they condemn the terrorists." . . . That was what they all said. But what was really in his mind? Schirke began to talk about Stalingrad:

"It is a severe blow. For us, and for the whole of Europe."

Pinaud sighed commiseratingly, but did not express an opinion. When Schirke asked him bluntly what he thought about it, he answered:

"You understand without my telling you that I cannot sympathize with the Communists. First of all, I am not poor enough for that. . . ."

But while they were having coffee Pinaud said:

"Yes, it is a severe blow indeed—twenty of your divisions, not counting the Rumanians. A heavy loss. I don't see how you are going to extricate yourselves from the situation. . . ."

The word "loss" infuriated Schirke—the money-grabber! He thinks only of profit and loss! But he gave no sign of his anger. He smiled and said:

"That's the figure the Reds give. I see that you listen in to London. The blow, as I said, is a severe one. But we shall make up for it in the summer. . . . The Bolsheviks must be checked at all costs, otherwise they will reach not only the Spree, but also the Seine. . . ."

"Our hopes rest upon your army," Pinaud hastened to say (he reproached himself for having been incautious).

After lunch Schirke went to his office. Major Scheffer said to him:
"The Colonel wants to see you."

Scheffer guessed what the matter was and looked at Schirke commiseratingly.

On leaving the Colonel's office Schirke was calm, but troubled.

"They are sending me to the East."

Scheffer sighed:

"Hard luck. . . . After all, you are no longer young. . . ."

"I don't mind. In fact, I am very glad. There is nothing to do here now. All the French can do is to disfigure walls with chalk. . . . As for the landing, I don't think there will be one; they will swing to the Balkans, or to Italy. . . . Russia is different: there the situation is really difficult."

"Did the Colonel tell you what appointment you are to have?"

"He didn't know. They are sending everybody they can possibly spare. . . . I am to go to Minsk and report to Commissar General Kube."

Alone, in his own room, Schirke thought to himself: It's a pity I shall not see Hans. Perhaps I shall never see him again. . . . He is a soldier. And I am going to Russia; the firing line is everywhere there. . . .

Schirke stepped out on the balcony and, in spite of the cold, stood for a long time gazing at Paris, enveloped in a slight mist, grey, aged and sad, at the city in which he had lived for so many years as if it were a room in a hotel. His thoughts were far away—in snow-covered Russia. The Reds were pushing onwards from Kursk. But the Colonel said that von Mannstein had mustered a strong force. It's hard to achieve victory, very hard. But we are Germans, and we shall achieve our object. . . .

Scheffer came running on to the balcony:

"They've just telephoned to say that a lieutenant on leave was shot by terrorists in the Avenue Wagram, near your house. In broad daylight! . . . And you said they are only capable of disfiguring walls. . . ."

"It's their parting greeting to me," said Schirke with a grim smile.

The shot in the Avenue Wagram left him cold: it was no longer his business. And what was one lieutenant after Stalingrad? . . . He said to Scheffer:

"If you have no objection, I'll go home. I have to pack my things."

He took another glance at Paris, which was slowly becoming submerged in a dark violet dusk. They disliked me here, and I disliked them. All the better. We must cast all sentiment aside, then victory will be ours. . . .

* 29 *

Gerda celebrated the new year not at all badly: her brother Friedrich, on leave from Norway (he brought her a warm sweater, a pair of gloves for Rudi, anchovies and chocolate), and the Frenzels were there. Alfred Frenzel had been declared unfit for active service again—he was

three fingers short on his right hand. In the past Gerda had pitied Martha: after all, it was not nice to have a husband who shook hands with his left hand. But Martha had the advantage now—she didn't have to be in a constant state of anxiety. Gerda had not received a letter from Johann for a long time. If she remained calm, even had a few drinks and felt merry on New Year's Eve, it was not because Johann had warned her that "letters won't be regular now," or because Friedrich said that "war was not the time for matrimonial duties," it was because she believed in Johann's lucky star. Last year he had taken part in the frightful battles for Moscow and did not even get his feet frozen. . . . And in one of his last letters he had calmed her fears by writing: "I am almost in Asia, but this is the South, and it is far warmer here than where I was last winter." . . .

Frenzel proposed a florid toast: "Let's drink to the success of the Führer's arms and Goethe's striving towards the light, to the magnanimity of the victors." Then Friedrich raised his glass and said in a blunt, soldierly way: "Here's to grinding all those bastards to powder." Rudi liked this toast and cried out "Sieg Heil!" To celebrate the occasion they had given him, too, a little champagne. Friedrich showed them some photographs of Norwegian beauties. Martha said she longed for travel and love. Frenzel, raising his mutilated hand kept on repeating: "What is needed is magnanimity"; Friedrich called him a "parson." But Gerda's thoughts were far away, "almost in Asia," as Johann had written. . . .

Gerda had remained faithful to her husband even in her thoughts; the sight of other men left her feelings unruffled. She censured her friends who behaved too freely. It was enough for some whippersnapper to arrive home on leave for all the ladies to invite him to their homes, stuff him with food and wine, question him about life at the front, sigh and say "I can't fall asleep thinking of him," and all this questioning "ends in bed—you can't defeat nature"—as the wife of the lecturer Wirth put it. Worse things than that happened. Gardener Krauss' wife, who had worked as a charwoman for the Kellers before the war, landed in prison for cohabiting with a French prisoner of war. Flushed with indignation Gerda said: "I'd cut her head off. How can a German woman allow a Frenchman even come near her? They stink of garlic, and they are all diseased." . . .

Gerda worked for the "Winter Relief" and had organized a children's dining room. It had been very hard last winter—she had to leave little Gretchen with a neighbour. In the summer she succeeded in getting a Russian servant, a girl of about eighteen. Gerda was pleased with her: she was modest, a good worker and quiet, too quiet perhaps, cowed, one might say—did her work in the daytime and at night sat in the kitchen and cried. When Friedrich came home she showed Olga (that was the servant's name) to him: "Take a look. . . . Johann wrote me that they are all terrified by the Bolsheviks, but I didn't realize what that meant

until I saw her." . . . Frenzel said: "All Russians worship suffering, you have only to read Dostoyevsky to know that." . . . Gerda was little interested in Olga's psychology; she was glad she had a servant. She could not have dreamed of having one before the war.

Soon after New Year Irma turned up without any warning. Gerda was glad to see her sister, but guessed at once that something unfortunate had happened. They had not seen each other for a long time. Irma had married an engineer and lived in Dortmund. Recently her husband had been drafted into the army.

"Why are you crying?" enquired Gerda. "Has anything happened to Willi? . . ."

Irma could not answer. Black drops rolled down her cheeks—the mascara had come off her eyelashes. At last she said:

"It is simply awful! . . . You have not gone through anything like it. It's worse in Dortmund than in Stalingrad. . . . Can you imagine it? I went to the movies to get a little diversion, I am going crazy since Willi went away. . . . It was a silly picture 'The Last Shadows.' Suddenly, in the middle of the picture the 'alert' sounded. Before we managed to get down to the shelter there was a terrific roar, I can't tell you what it was like . . . I screamed like mad 'Mama! . . .' Poor Mama, it's awful in Stuttgart too. . . . To cut a long story short, when we left the cinema Schillerstrasse was no longer there. I simply don't remember how I got home. . . . Max advised me to go away. . . . Give me some water, I'll take some valerian drops, I'll go mad, don't be surprised, I will, it's quite natural. . . ."

Irma came to live with Gerda and at once the small apartment was filled with the smell of sweet scent and disorder. Torn stockings lay about on Johann's books. Irma shouted that Olga was a pig, that Rudi was badly brought up, that he was rude and did not know his manners; she stuffed Gretchen with the chocolates her brother had brought from Norway (Gerda had put them away for Johann in case he came home). Every evening she had a fit of hysteria, shouted that Dortmund had been wiped off the face of the earth, that Mama would be killed and that Willi would never return from Russia.

Gerda became despondent. Another month passed, and still there was no news from Johann. Weeping copious tears, Irma kept on repeating: "Johann is in Stalingrad, Willi is in Stalingrad, they are all in Stalingrad." Gerda knew that her sister was talking nonsense: Willi was somewhere near Novgorod. But Johann, yes, he may really be in Stalingrad. . . .

Three days' mourning was declared; the theatres and cinemas were closed. Funereal music was given over the radio. Frenzel came, and wishing to comfort Gerda, said: "Perhaps Johann is not there, maybe he is in the Caucasus." . . . So Frenzel also thinks that Johann is in Stalingrad. . . . Gerda went into the kitchen to get some glasses. Olga was sitting by the window smiling. Forgetting about the glasses, Gerda ran

to her room and burst into tears. Irma at once became calm and counted valerian drops into a glass; Frenzel kept on repeating: "I have a feeling that Johann is in the Caucasus." . . . But Gerda wept with rage. She had sheltered a snake in her home! Not once had she beaten her, she had even given her an old skirt. . . . And now that slut was glad that so many honest Germans had perished. Perhaps Johann was one of them. . . . It's true, the Russians are not human. Johann was right when he wrote that one would like to pity them, but it was impossible. . . .

"That bitch is glad," Gerda said to Frenzel.

Frenzel thought for a moment, then, sticking his hand in the breast of his coat, he said:

"Universal ferocity. The chariot of mankind has encountered an obstacle. But I am convinced that Hitler is the element of light, Phoebus. . . . But what I am afraid of is that people will tear at each other's throats. . . ."

When he went away Irma said:

"There's something wrong not only with his hand. In my opinion he's crazy. . . . What's going on has driven lots of people crazy. A bank clerk in Dortmund took it into his head that the end of the world has come, and when the 'all clear' was sounded he went into the street absolutely naked. . . . Listen to me, Gerda, you ought to lock up that Russian pig of yours at night. You've got to be careful with those Russians."

Gerda heard a major speak over the radio; he had been in Stalin-grad up to the twentieth of January. He said it had been frightfully cold there, there had been nothing to eat, the Germans had defended the city like the heroes of antiquity, but the besiegers had outnumbered the besieged who had succumbed in the unequal battle.

Gerda looked at Olga with hatred burning in her heart: that slut had four brothers and three sisters. There were too many of those Russians! And they want to annihilate us. We, who have culture, universities and ideas, while they have only brute strength. It was sufficient to see the way Olga picked up a sack of coal. . . .

A letter arrived from her mother. "Dear Gerda. You are constantly in my thoughts. How is Johann? We here are having an awful time. I have lived through a night that I thought would be my last. The railway station is gone. Frau Ziegel was buried in her cellar. I cannot understand why we should have to endure such suffering. . . ."

"Why am I enduring such suffering?" Gerda asked herself. Nobody could answer that question for her. Friedrich had gone back to Norway long ago. Irma had suddenly stopped crying and was carrying on a flirtation with a boy in the Anti-Aircraft Squad. The Frenzels came. Martha was in tears:

"They say that Alfred will be called up. How can he shoot when he has three fingers missing? It's unheard of! . . ."

Frenzel said:

"To the black owls we must oppose the light of Goethe and the good will of the Führer. . . ."

At last came the official notification: "Corporal Johann Keller died for the Führer and for Germany."

All day long Gerda lay in a darkened room with a wet towel round her head. Irma went to insert an announcement in the newspaper and ripped the pink trimmings off her sister's black dress. But Gerda lay motionless; she saw visions of snow, lots and lots of snow; on the snow Johann was lying, and huge Russian ravens were pecking at his body. . . .

Next morning she made an effort to get up. Gretchen had to be dressed and Rudi sent off to school. She went into the kitchen. Olga was giving the boy his coffee. He was teaching her to speak German; he asked her what "Seife" was in Russian, she answered "mylo"; he could not pronounce the word properly and they both laughed.

Olga had been in a brighter mood lately. A Russian woman who was employed at a local drug store told her: "The Germans have received a good licking. We shall be going home soon." . . . Olga believed that she would soon see her mother and sisters. The Germans killed Misha at the very beginning of the war; what had happened to her father and the other brothers, she did not know.

"How do you say it? 'Meelo'?" Rudi asked, still laughing.

Beside herself with rage, Gerda snatched up a scrubbing brush and struck Olga with it. Rudi was scared and crawled under the table. Gerda dropped the brush and stood there in tears: this would not bring Johann back. . . .

* 30 *

Everywhere Krylov saw the figure 13—on the German maps, that was the number of the Voronezh-Kursk road. The superstitious probably thought that this was the reason. . . . In the effort to escape, the Germans abandoned everything—artillery and staff papers. The road was jammed with thousands of abandoned automobiles and anti-aircraft guns, and littered with suitcases bearing the labels of all the hotels in Europe. straw overshoes, mouth-organs, mines, typewriters, bottles of French cognac, field glasses, crumpled iron and mutilated bodies. A head with pince-nez on the nose protruded from the snow, and next to it a pair of pink heels, looking like strange, wild vegetation. Smoke-blackened snow. The car crawled over stiff bodies, frozen as hard as stone. And the figure 13 hovered—over the snowdrifts, over the dead, over a horse's head. A hellish department store—why did they grind lenses in Jena, why did the Neufchâtel clockmaker regulate the chronometer, and the Dutch cheese makers build dams, drain the sea and rear cows? . . . They say that there are savages in Polynesia. . . . But these—with their optics, their sound detectors and their "Leicas"—what would you call them? The fields of

Kursk present a sad picture as a result of the invasion of these savage things. A Crusade of six-barrelled mortars and toilet paper....

"I am tired," thought Krylov to himself, "and so all sorts of nonsense enters my head. The main thing is that we've got them on the run. We've been on the march for three weeks! It's no joke. We should reach Kursk soon...."

Towards evening a blizzard blew again. Columns of snow whirled in the middle of the fields. There had probably never been a blizzard like this in the month of February before. And the frost! Germans who had tried to hide came creeping out of the woods, knocked at the doors of peasants' huts, froze by the wayside. Everything was moving westward: cars and trucks, infantry, tractors, hospitals, sappers with dogs which barked with a ringing bark, trucks loaded with furniture—the Military Council's dining room—journalists, the Kursk militia. Snowdrifts—even the snowdrifts were hastening somewhere.

Krylov sang (flat, of course) "When I a mail coach driver was."... Why did he, and others, sing so often about coach drivers and troikas? * It was the call of the road. And you can't rob the road of its sadness, even if it is a jolly road, even if it runs westward....

During the last few weeks Krylov had lived through his grief again. Natasha's letter came during the hectic days: we were piercing the front of the Hungarians. Then came now quiet Voronezh, night; he had passed on for about three hundred metres when the houses began to go up in the air.... The very earth quaked under one's feet. Wounded were carried past—our men, Magyars and Germans. Nobody was yet conscious of victory; the extraordinary strain was stupefying. And amidst this deathly turmoil, amidst blood-soaked bandages, groans, the hiccups and the rattle in the throats of the dying, amidst explosions so powerful that the jars and surgical instruments jumped, amidst the December fighting, Krylov's grief was dulled. At that time he was not fully conscious of the bereavement that had afflicted him. Only when they began to move westward, when they reached Kastornaya and the panorama of the German débâcle unfolded before his eyes—the plain, furrowed by tanks, torn up by Storm Troopers, only then did he realize that Varya was gone, that there was no one to write to about the victory, no one to live with.

Of course, he had Natasha, but you can't tell everything to a child....

How much he and Varya had gone through together. They had quarrelled, had argued, had suffered when they were away from each other! Like a mountain river which roars and swirls at its beginning, but later runs slow and deep, their love had passed from the passion

* Horses harnessed three abreast.—*Tr.*

of the early years to such human intimacy that now that Varya was gone, Dmitri Alexeyevich was in a state of utter desolation.

None of his comrades had an inkling of how much he was suffering; they knew that Krylov's wife had died, but amidst all that was going on here, the peaceful demise of an elderly woman could not strike the imagination. And Krylov, who was unable to conceal joy, astonishment or anger, concealed his grief as nobody else could—the only change in him was, perhaps, that he became somewhat subdued and laughed less often. They said to him: "You are tired, Dmitri Alexeyevich, one can see that." . . . He himself believed that, and when his heart became particularly heavy he grumbled to himself: everybody is tired, naturally. . . .

It became harder and harder to push forward. The roads became blocked by snowdrifts two hours after they were cleared. The snow seethed like the ocean in a storm, and automobiles, men and sledges vanished in the heaving waves. But the westward drive did not cease for a single hour. Something pushed the men onward in spite of the cold and mortal weariness. Here and there the Germans tried to make a stand; but even mortars proved ineffective—our men pushed on under fire. Was it so long ago that the army was in hasty retreat, when the men heeded rumours, scattered when German tanks appeared, and each one brooded despondently over the strength of the enemy and about having to retreat again and again? Within a few days victory had transformed them all; self-confidence revived; they knew that they would push through and go on further; nothing would stop them now.

One night Krylov reached a small town. Wooden houses of the last century; it looked as though all the Five-Year Plans had carefully avoided this out-of-the-way place. Krylov knocked at the door of one of the houses. The room to which he was taken was occupied by a young woman with a small boy. Dmitri Alexeyevich lay down on a short couch and drew in his legs.

"Lie down on the bed, you'll get no rest that way."

"It doesn't matter. . . . In fact, it's more comfortable that way."

The little boy woke up and became capricious: "Mum, I want some jam."

As he dozed off Krylov thought to himself: where did they get jam? . . .

It was still dark when the boy woke him. The woman had prepared breakfast. It turned out that the jam was no fable. On retreating, the Germans had set fire to the warehouses and the inhabitants of the town rushed to save all the canned goods they could from the fire.

Krylov asked the young woman:

"Are you glad?"

"I can hardly believe it's true. . . . If only I could find my husband. He is in the Air Force. I don't know whether he is alive. . . ."

She had beautiful, sad eyes.

"Were the Germans rough?" Krylov asked her.

"As soon as they came they began robbing. They took my samovar and alarm clock. But later they did not even look into the place..."

Suddenly the boy butted into the conversation:

"But Mum! Otto came here every night."

"Don't tell fibs!"

The boy snivelled:

"I am not telling fibs... Otto played with me, and he played with you..."

The woman turned away. Krylov's face turned a deep red and he left the room.

An old woman living next door pulled him into her room:

"Come in and sit down for a while, my dear. Let me have a look at you... After all, you are one of our own."

She wept, and weeping she pressed him to eat some tough sausage and German honey, at which he wrinkled his nose. She showed him a photograph:

"My son is in the army. Milochka, the Germans took away..."

A red flag was hoisted over the house which only the day before had served as the German Kommandatur. Dossiers, newspapers and a coloured portrait of Hitler bearing the caption "Liberator" were scattered about the place. Dmitri Alexeyevich lost his temper and, like a child, trampled upon the portrait: "Damned colt!..."

A woman related:

"When they were preparing to go away, Losinov, he was their burgomaster, came running up shouting: 'Take me with you!' One of the Germans said: 'Go to hell! We can't bother with you. We're leaving all the stores here, so do you think we'll lug the likes of you!...'—he knew all the Russian swear words. Losinov came up to me and said: 'Write a statement that I saved your Ignatka from the noose, I will give you a cow if you do.'... That evening the Reds came..."

Krylov enquired:

"What do you mean—the Reds?"

The woman smiled in confusion.

"It's a habit we caught from them... We caught all sorts..."

"All sorts, that's just it!" barked Dmitri Alexeyevich. "Rotten ideas, venereal disease, the devil take them, lots of it, and lice!..."

Later he saw Dr. Galkina. Her arm was broken: a German had beaten her up. Galkina had hidden two Red Army men in the municipal hospital and later had got them over to the partisans.

In some way she reminded him of his late wife—a grey streak in her dark hair, pale blue veins on her temples, and she gasped for breath as soon as she became agitated. Dmitri Alexeyevich listened to the story of her experiences she briefly related to him and then burst out:

"You are a heroine! You must let me kiss you. There's such a lot of rotten stuff about here, the air is putrid, so it's a pleasure to meet one of our own people, I mean Soviet people..."

She answered softly:

"I haven't done anything particular. They tortured everybody..."

She wanted to say something more, but evidently could not find the words.

Kursk. For some reason he kept asking himself: where are the famous Kursk nightingales? ... Silly thoughts do enter your head when you are tired. ... Look at the number of houses they have blown up, the barbarians! It's a beautiful town for all that, the river, and the steep street sloping up. ... Everywhere there are notices: "For Germans Only." The earth is also for them, the devil take them. Who is it that's being buried, I ask? ... They've turned everything upside down. They have mutilated and corrupted the people. We'll have a hard job later on. We'll not only have to build houses, we'll have to nurse people back to decency. This was the first time that Krylov thought of the future. He could not picture to himself how it would all end. It had commenced suddenly. He well remembered that Sunday morning. ... Perhaps it had not commenced then, but earlier—in Poland, in Madrid, still earlier, when that colt began prancing. ... Perhaps it will not end suddenly? But how he would like it to end, so that people should not hear this rotten music for a hundred years to come. When you have listened quite enough to the roar of mortars there is one thing you regret—why you didn't listen to the song of the nightingales before the war. And where are the Kursk nightingales? How absurd, it is winter now. ...

Krylov worked all day long; he had eleven operations to perform. In the evening Sergeant Kukushkin was brought in. The orderly said that he had been one of the first to enter the town and had picked off the Germans who were firing from the roofs. "A sniper, second to none in our unit," she said. ... Krylov examined the wound—it was a serious one. The nurse took the patient's temperature—thirty-nine and eight. Gas gangrene—obviously.

"Will you amputate?" the nurse enquired.

He growled:

"All you know is to cut..."

He incised the swelling, removed the bone fragments and put on a plaster bandage. He'll pull through, I think. A sniper. ... Can't get on very well without a leg. He's young, probably has a wife, or a girl, anyway, not like me, twenty-three years, in the very prime. ...

That night he spoke to Colonel Tishchenko, a member of the Military Council, about Galkina.

"You know, there's not many like her. She has a broken arm, but she says: 'It's nothing much.' ... Things are in such a tangle here that

it won't be easy to unravel—rottenness and heroism, it's as plain as twice two are four, and yet nobody will believe it.... Fifteen months under the Germans is no joke. I can imagine what they have done in Paris, or in Warsaw...."

The Colonel bent over his map and poked a short stumpy finger at a point somewhere on the Dnieper:

"Things will move quickly now."

"You know best, Comrade Colonel, but it seems to me that this music is going to last a long time yet. I don't place any reliance on German intelligence; we will reach Berlin before those colts come to their senses. We may have to fight another year, if not more...."

He went to the battalion hospital base.

"How's that Sergeant. You know who I mean. I've forgotten his name, Kurochkin, isn't it? ..."

"You mean Kukushkin? He's asleep." ...

He'll pull through. But Vasya, evidently he's killed.... I must write to Natasha....

Dmitri Alexeyevich walked out of the building and looked around—it was blowing hard, snow was whirling from the sky and from the ground, the road was snowed up again. He began to sing:

*And my coachman fell silent, but the road
Stretched far, far before me....*

We still have a long way to go. And we must live. But Varya is dead.... I'm tired, naturally.... It's nothing, I'll manage. I'd love to have a peep at my grandson. Natashka writes—a noisy fellow, few like him, so he takes after me....

PART FIVE

* 1 *

THE STAFF had its headquarters in a birch wood. Birds were singing and bluebells grew all around. The dugouts were comfortably furnished: Colonel Gabler even had a writing desk and a bookstand in his quarters.

The Colonel was in a gloomy mood. He took the envelope which Richter handed him without a word. Richter clicked his heels and made for the door. The Colonel stopped him:

"Wait," he said. "How is your wife?"

"Quite well, thank you, Herr Colonel. I received a letter yesterday."

"You had better write and advise her to leave Berlin. My family left just in time. The house you built for me no longer exists—a direct hit."...

Richter was not sure whether it would be appropriate to offer the Colonel his commiseration. He said:

"These barbarous air raids are simply awful! If you permit me, I will build another house for you after we have achieved victory. I have certain new ideas in architecture that I would like to try out..."

The Colonel smiled grimly when Richter left: "After we have achieved victory..." They don't realize what the situation is, Gabler's gloom was not due to the fact that a bomb had wrecked the house, into the building and furnishing of which he had put his soul, right down to every petty detail. At present his mind was absorbed by the forthcoming offensive. Of course, we are better prepared this time, and the objective is smaller... but still, I doubt whether we shall succeed. There has been too much blundering during the past two years... Even an educated man like Richter believes in the magic of the calendar; they think we have divided the year into two parts: winter for the Reds and the summer for us. But we have to foster this illusion—the men are losing heart: they receive letters from home telling them about air raids, everybody is worried about what the Allies intend to do, they

are all weary—it will soon be four years.... Hitherto we determined the course of the war, now we are being carried along by the stream.

In the evening the Colonel talked with Major Hillebrandt of the Intelligence Service. Gabler asked him bluntly:

“What do you think of the plan of operations?”

“It’s a good plan. In my opinion, the offensive may put off our retreat.”

The Colonel and the Major had been acquainted since they were boys, they had gone to school together. The Colonel, therefore, expressed his frank opinion.

“I doubt whether we can expect even as much as that. The men are not what they were before.... We have lost the best of them. The main thing is that the morale is not what it was. This last winter was fatal. I ask myself how an army with such traditions could have committed so many blunders. I know you will say that the army is not to blame, that it is the amateurs who keep interfering. That’s true. But still, we too are to blame. The way the Intelligence Service, for example, has been operating is simply disgusting.”

“Do you think we did not know about the Russian reserves? I told you about the Reds’ plan when we were still in Stary Oskol, when we had only just been transferred.... We knew that the Russians had concentrated strong forces both in the East and in the North. I reported this to General Grimm, but I realized at once that it was no use my talking. Of course, it would be pleasanter if the Russians did not have those divisions.... General Grimm decided that it would be better not to upset Lieutenant-General von Salmuth. This is not idle gossip. General Grimm told me plainly: ‘The Army Commander can’t stand reports of this kind.’... I am convinced that General von Salmuth is afraid of rousing the Führer’s displeasure by reporting that the Reds have concentrated large forces, and of getting a reprimand instead of a Ritterkreuz. And besides, his name would call up unpleasant associations in the Führer’s mind.... We are deceiving each other. Naturally, the Russians are taking advantage of this. You were talking about the forthcoming operation.... Yesterday General Grimm summoned me. I reported to him, but he interrupted me and said: ‘That’s not important, an S.S. division will support us on the right.’... I was telling him about the self-propelled guns the Reds had, that was my duty; he knew about the S.S. division without my telling him. But he would not let me finish.... Do you know why we are beginning to lose? Because we won too easily. The moral is as old as the world....”

“This time superiority of numbers seems to be on our side. The General said that the West has been denuded of forces....”

“Yes, we have information to the effect that nothing will happen in France this summer....”

“But still, it is risky.... We cannot fight on two fronts.... It was

a mistake to entrust our diplomacy to a nonentity like Ribbentrop.... Naturally, it will be difficult to reach an agreement with the Reds now, we have been pursuing a policy that has embittered even the children. But if we had different diplomats we could reach an agreement with the Western powers.... Of course, if we rid ourselves of some of the more odious personages...."

"What, then, is to be done, in your opinion," Major Hillebrandt enquired.

"What we are doing.... We have no alternative. We will have to answer for other people's blunders, Horst.... I have confidence in the army, it is the most permanent institution in Germany. We must make an effort, if not to achieve victory, at least to hold on and save our country from invasion. Historians, perhaps, will describe the forthcoming operations not as the Battle of Kursk, but as the Battle of Germany...."

Richter had no inkling of the gloomy thoughts that filled Gabler's mind; all he saw was that the Colonel was in a bad mood, and he put this down to the news he had received about his house. Richter himself returned to the battalion in by no means a cheerful mood. He had written Hilde several times advising her to go to her cousin Johanna's place in the Harz, but Hilde had replied that the talk about air raids was exaggerated. "I shall go mad there," she wrote. "I am so worried about you, and here every trifle reminds me of you and I feel calmer."... When he received this letter Richter was touched, but at once the thought occurred to him that Hilde was deceiving him. Obviously, the air raids were serious, and if she was unwilling to leave Berlin it must be because she had gotten herself a lover there. That woman was capable of making love even during an air raid.... Richter decided to write a stern letter to Hilde: she must go to the Harz at once. Just as he sat down to write Cockroach came in:

"Did you have a talk with the Colonel?..."

"We exchanged a few words. He told me his house has been wrecked. In Hallensee...."

Cockroach swore:

"The bastards! Killing defenceless civilians.... My old woman barely managed to get out of Hamburg. This is a hellish war.... It's quite evident that something's going to start here in a day or two. Didn't the Colonel give you a hint?"

"No. His mind seemed to be taken up with something or other...."

"I know what it was.... I think we'll be the ones to start. The Reds are also preparing.... If only we succeed. If we don't finish them off now, we'll be in a mess again in the winter...."

Richter glanced at Cockroach and became thoughtful—even Cockroach is down in the dumps! He no longer boasts about the way he took forty Russians prisoner near Brest, he no longer chases after girls,

he frequently mentions his wife, calling her his "old woman," grumbles that he is fed up with fighting and that "we have landed in a mess." He has aged—he is twenty-nine, but looks forty....

"If I were given the lads I had at the beginning of the war I would feel easier in my mind," said Cockroach. "But you know the trash they have sent us. One has asthma, another is as blind as a bat, a third's got his heart in his mouth—been hiding in a bunnyhole in Vienna up till now. All I rely on are the 'Tigers.' They are real machines, they are! They say they can withstand the heaviest shells.... Perhaps the 'Tigers' will save us.... After all's said and done, we are too cultured a nation to love fighting, that's a business for Ivans. We can beat them only with machines. The question is: how many 'Tigers' have we got?"

Richter felt sorry for Cockroach and so he answered:

"The Colonel said we had a lot."

But this failed to console Cockroach. The thought that he might be killed had never occurred to him before: he had regarded thoughts of death as cowardice. But now he thought to himself: I'm afraid I shall never get out of this. Forest all around, golden in the setting sun. Cockroach recalled the woods near the town where he had grown up—pine trees, the ground carpeted with pine needles, large, yellow snails, green benches. Inexpressible sadness overwhelmed him; he sat down to write a letter to his "old woman," but he put the pen down at once and became lost in thought: Why must I die? Is the world so crowded that people must kill each other?... He took up his pen and wrote: "I request that my money and my watch be sent to my wife, Frau Anna Grün, residing in Leimertwitz, and that she be written to and told that I died a true Christian. I enjoin my beloved wife to bring up our children to respect religion and the memory of their poor father." Cockroach had not been to church for about ten years, and he himself did not understand why he had suddenly decided that he was religious. Perhaps it was because he wanted to please his "old woman" who, as he himself put it, "stank of incense." Or perhaps it was because he was struck by doubt—if one has to die for no reason at all, there must really be a God.... On the envelope he wrote: "To be opened after my death."

Richter wrote to Hilde begging her to leave Berlin, threatening: "If you have hitched on to somebody, don't count on my being killed. I am far in the rear and will soon get leave," and vowing his love: "I can't fall asleep, I have a foreboding that there will be an air raid in Berlin tonight."...

"What's the date today?" he asked Marabou in order to date the letter.

"The fourth. Exactly a year ago our offensive started in the South. I have just looked up my diary—fifth of July. We were stationed at Gzhatsk then. I believed that was the decisive battle.... Our forces advanced without stopping from Kharkov to the Caucasus...."

Richter laughed ironically:

"And after that, without stopping, from the Caucasus to Kharkov. Aren't you fed up with this quadrille?..."

"One doesn't joke about such things, Richter..."

"I am not joking. I have lost my brother in this quadrille..."

"We have lost too many, Richter. Sometimes it seems to me that the German army is a legion of phantoms. Only the cowards and hypocrites have remained. Colonel Gabler is an intellectual eunuch—he is fighting only because it is his profession."

Richter enquired angrily:

"It would be interesting to know why you are fighting."

"I? ... I believe in the Führer. Last winter was our retribution—we had been taken up too much with trophies and girls, we became soft and settled, we began to fraternize with the Reds. I remember how you stuck in the Russians' houses in Rzhev and played with their children..."

"What was wrong about that? Bandits deserve to be hanged, but we are not waging war against civilians."

"There are no civilians. That term is now obsolete..."

Marabou plucked a flower.

"What do you think this is?"

"A daisy, of course..."

"Yes, it can grow anywhere, and even a dairymaid can admire it. It is no accident that edelweiss is the Führer's flower. To pluck it one must climb a mountain..."

Richter yawned loudly:

"I'm fed up with your poetry, Marabou. I don't want your daisies and I don't want your edelweiss. I want to take a bath, put on a dressing gown and stretch out on a couch, with no Russian artillery, no historical missions and no you. Do you understand me?..."

That evening Cockroach read the order of the day. He became unrecognizable, his melancholy vanished; twiddling his moustaches he said cheerfully:

"Now we are really prepared. We'll make the Russians feel what our technique means. The 'Tigers' will decide the issue."

Next morning it started. Artillery and mortar shells shattered the birch wood. First the tanks went out. For a few hours even Richter cheered up: everything reminded him of the fever of victory. They advanced four kilometres. Who would believe that the Russians were still holding out in that trench? ... Later Richter recalled that short battle as the most frightful he had taken part in all through the war; and yet he had gone through the first winter, the flight from Kastornaya and the "Ivan" artillery. One moment of that battle had been exceptionally frightful: Richter had seen a Russian swing the butt of his tommy gun at Marabou. Richter fled; he could not understand how he had survived.

When they counted up their losses the effect was most depressing: they had paid too high a price for this strip of land. . . . Cockroach tried to cheer himself and his comrades: "It's the beginning that's hard. . . . The Russians have no more fortifications like this." . . .

Richter thought about Marabou. It was awful to think that he had been rude to him before his death. . . . True, he was unbearable at times, but he believed in an idea. And besides, he had been an old comrade-in-arms, they had started in the war together. . . . Richter recalled their discussions on philosophy, poetry and architecture. Marabou had expressed interesting ideas; he said that after conquering Europe the Germans would live like knights in fortified castles, and architects would devise a new style that would express the conquest of nature. And yet he died from the blow of a semiliterate fanatic. . . . The tragic collision between thought and brute strength! . . .

Next day they advanced another three kilometres. On the third day they made two attempts to attack; they reached a low hill and then were hurled back. Cockroach still rested his hopes on the "Tigers." It was only on the fourth day that his faith was shaken when he saw a "Tiger" with its armour pierced. "Those scoundrels are using thermite shells," he mumbled.

The earth was still trembling, but everybody felt that the battle was subsiding; they were all so dead tired that they thought to themselves: to hell with this Kursk! . . . A dugout seemed like a cosy nest. The pauses that began to intervene between the artillery barrages roused emotional thoughts. And when, during one such pause, Cockroach heard a cuckoo, which must have been really crazy for remaining in that shattered wood, he began to count the days he still had left to live. And the cuckoo went on uttering its mournful call.

Suddenly Richter burst out laughing.

"What's the matter with you?" Cockroach enquired.

"Listen! Before the war a certain colonel told me that we would march into Russia without any real fighting, that it would be 'semi-peaceful penetration.' . . . Funny, isn't it?"

Cockroach never allowed himself to laugh at anything his superiors said. He answered in a grave tone:

"It was hard to foresee. . . . Still, it's a good thing we did penetrate into the heart of Russia. Can you imagine what would have become of Germany had the war been fought there? . . . Yesterday I read in the newspaper that we captured so much territory in order to save Germany from invasion. That's reasonable. True, we have not captured Kursk, but we have achieved our object—Ivan won't be able to move now, we have upset his plans. . . ."

For all that, Cockroach, like the others, was on tenterhooks: suppose the Russians launch a counter-offensive? And indeed, early in the morning on the eleventh of July, the Reds opened terrific artillery fire.

Everybody prepared for an attack by the Russians and passed through several extremely uncomfortable hours. But later the Reds quietened down.

Cockroach congratulated Richter and said:

"They tried to come on, but they got it in the neck. It looks as though the summer is going to be a quiet one. The Russians are waiting to see what the Allies will do. But we have prepared for all contingencies—both here and there..."

Colonel Gabler, now somewhat calmer after a terrible week, was having a quiet game of patience. He thought to himself: they are no luckier than we are, I think. An equilibrium has set in....

At dawn next day the Russians again opened hurricane fire. Their guns roared incessantly for nearly three hours. Then Cockroach saw Russian tanks in the distance. Why is our anti-tank artillery so feeble? Only the Reds are visible in the sky, none of our planes are.... Something had gone wrong, and this troubled Cockroach. He ordered his tommy gunners to get into their fox holes and if the Reds got into the trench they were to shoot at their legs....

But half an hour later Cockroach yelled: "Beat it!..."

Colonel Gabler said to General Grimm over the telephone:

"How can I hold on when only three or four men are left in each company?..."

Warm, summer rain fell. Then the sun came out again. The raindrops glistened on the leaves. Richter recalled how Hilde had wept at the railway station. Women have intuition, they can sense trouble like a cat.

* 2 *

The heavy rains, which had made the world look dark blue, gave way to hours of dazzling brightness. It seemed to Minayev that he had never seen so many flowers—bluebells, snapdragon, daisies, carnations and cowheat. This is Paradise—he thought to himself, and then the thought made him laugh—a nice sort of Paradise. Yesterday a tommy gunner nearly got me, and at night it was hell let loose, the Fritzes tried to recapture this blasted little village and released two "Tigers."... But the flowers—they don't care a damn....

"Where's the Battalion Commander?"

The track ended in a copse; the sergeant tore the branches apart with his hands.

They had occupied this little village at last, the day before. The operation had been a complicated one. Minayev had said jokingly that it was "Cannes on a regimental scale." When our tanks reached the cart track the battalion of which Osip was in command began to storm the village which was situated on the high bank of a small river. The Ger-

mans had fortified it very strongly. Colonel Medvedev ordered Minayev's battalion to make a detour through the forest to the cart track and cut off the Germans' retreat. They forced their way into the village from the south; the Germans resisted until midday—firing from the attics. A captain and a hundred men were taken prisoner; they found the dead body of a major.

On catching sight of Osip, Minayev burst out laughing:

"Before the war I saw an American film, there was an escaped convict in it—you are the very picture of him. . . ."

Osip's face was thickly powdered with dust; a beard had sprouted on his chin; his eyes were inflamed from weariness; his voice was hoarse, as after a drunken spree—all these days he had been obliged to shout his orders owing to the terrific roar. Stroking his cheek he said:

"I wonder why the beard grows faster when there is something on?"

"I can give you a scientific explanation—when something is on you stop shaving. They'll bring the captain along soon; he's got a growth too, but his mug shows a crop failure, if anything, whereas your crop is of tropical luxuriance. If we meet with another two or three points of resistance you will change from a convict into a patriarch."

One of the men brought up the German captain. He was a regular army officer, about forty years of age, and wore decorations for the French campaign and for the autumn of nineteen forty-one. The fact that he was a prisoner of war did not affect his soldierly bearing. He answered the questions put to him with courtesy and restraint. When the interrogation was over he turned to Osip and said:

"May I ask you a question, Herr Major?"

"You may," answered Osip.

"I have not had the opportunity to speak to Russian officers before. I think you conducted this attack in a very able manner, and I would like to know where you received your training."

Osip laughed:

"At Stalingrad. . . ."

When the prisoner of war was taken away Minayev laughed and said:

"He looked at you, you look like a convict—but he is the prisoner. And so he thought that you are a graduate of the Military Academy, a red Clausewitz. Do you know what's surprising?—Our men are real soldiers. They are tired, they swear like hell, they are fed up with everything, but they are fighting splendidly. My men brought in eight Fritzes today; they raised such a shindy that the Fritzes thought that it was at least a battalion attacking them. But there were only three of my men—Sharapov, a collective farmer—not a tractor driver, not a team leader, but a plain, ordinary rank-and-filer; then there was Klocho, supposed to be a cook, he worked in a dining room somewhere—a bad cook but

a good eater; and the third was a cashier, or a thief, I haven't got to the bottom of that yet, he stammers, and I have no time to listen to his explanation to the end. A sergeant surrendered to them, you should see him—ten years' service in the army, four decorations, bristling hair, doesn't talk, but barks—as if he were von Paulius. . . . To put it plainly, the Fritzes are played out."

Osip remembered being in this forest in the cold, dark autumn of nineteen forty-one. He was then making his way away from Bryansk; his men were deserting. They reached Bolkhov, but found Germans there. People said that the Germans had also captured Tula. Nobody knew anything. A general was standing in the road swearing like a trooper, but nobody took any notice of him, didn't even stop to look. . . .

We are fighting for Orel, in the very heart of Russia, three hundred kilometres from Moscow, but you get the impression that we are approaching the frontier. It's silly, of course, because we are sustaining heavy losses and we have not yet captured Orel, but still, one gets the impression that the issue is decided, we have only to finish the game. Minayev says that the Fritzes are "played out." The hell they are! They are fighting desperately, clinging to every hummock. It's not the Germans; it's we who have changed. A year ago we fought as if we were dazed; but now we are fighting calmly and accurately. . . .

"We are fighting with accuracy now, that's the whole point," said Osip to Minayev.

Together they went to see the Regimental Commander. There was a heavy downpour again. There had not been a rainy summer like this for a long time. Shouting in disunion, some men were laboriously hauling a truck out of the mud.

A German "frame" scouting plane appeared.

"Come on, put your backs into it, they'll be coming over soon! . . ."

They were all drenched with rain and perspiration. The Germans dropped about a dozen bombs on the copse. Minayev said, as if the conversation had been casually interrupted:

"What has accuracy got to do with it? I tell you they are played out. . . . Do you remember the first summer? They chased every one of our machines. They dived for the very least thing. . . . Now they stumble even in the sky. . . . Look! Those are ours! . . ."

Nine bombers, escorted by "Yaks," were speeding southward.

"Aren't they beautiful?" commented Osip.

"Do you want to see a 'Tiger'? It's quite close, about a kilometre from here. Sinelnikov stopped it. . . ."

The "Tiger" looked a wretched thing: just a heap of iron. "He got him right in his fuel tank," said Minayev. There was not another soul around, but there were flowers, lots of flowers, an idyllic scene. . . .

Osip and Minayev went to the C.P. Lieutenant-Colonel Medvedev was sitting on a wooden case in a hazel copse, snoring very loudly. He

opened his eyes and shook himself, as if he had emerged from the river.

"We must get to the highroad. General Ignatov telephoned—the Germans are evacuating Orel for Karachev..."

They pored over the map for a long time. Orel was surrounded with red arrows; one from below was speeding towards Kromy, another came from Mtsensk, a third from Bolkhov; there was one that swerved from Stanovoi Kolodyez northward; and still another, a straight one, pierced the highroad.

"We must come out on it at Khotynets," said Medvedev. "Not an easy job, of course—the forest ends, open country, strongly fortified... Our neighbour has done well..."

"Gurov?"

"No, I am speaking of Petryakov."

Half an hour later a sapper arrived from Petryakov's outfit. It was Sergei. He said that the sappers could make a passage for Medvedev too.

Sergei sat down and ran a stump of a pencil over the map.

"Here... And here... I'm dying for a smoke!..."

Nobody had any cigarettes. Medvedev took out his tobacco pouch and they rolled cigarettes with newspaper... Then Medvedev treated them to a meal of canned pork. Osip and Sergei got into conversation; it turned out that they had both been at Katarzha in February.

"And didn't they bomb that Katarzha!"

Had Osip told Sergei who he was, perhaps Sergei would have recalled that Valya had told him about her friends in Kiev, about the Pickwick Club, and about capricious Raya who had long eyelashes and a dull husband. But Osip did not say who he was, and they smiled to each other amiably only because they had both been at Russky Brod, then at Katarzha, and now they had met here, near Khotynets...

Sergei went off to see Petryakov. Three hours later his sappers were creeping along, pressing close to the wet ground—the Germans were putting up a mortar barrage. The sappers worked with nippers and clippers; the sound of snapping wire was heard. Sergei felt extremely agitated and for that reason seemed exceptionally calm, even imperturbable. He had not slept for two nights, and he felt no desire for sleep, only his face and the palms of his hands were hot. When the sappers safely returned, he yawned mournfully and stretched out on the wet grass. He fell asleep at once, and although there was a battery nearby, he missed the opening of the attack.

When Sergei left, Osip said to Minayev:

"That Major seems to be a sensible fellow... A lot depends on the sappers now. Yesterday, two of our tanks were blown up at Odinets because the mines had not been cleared thoroughly enough..."

"Only he doesn't look like a soldier," answered Minayev, smiling as he recalled Sergei standing in his drenched tunic with his head thrown

back. "He resembles Pushkin reciting poetry to Derzhavin.... You know that painting..."

"To you, everybody resembles someone or other," answered Osip. "I resemble a convict; that Major resembles Pushkin. Whom do you resemble?"

"I? Lensky probably. Firstly, yesterday a Fritz nearly shot me dead—he missed, so it is quite evident that he was not Onegin; secondly, I can't dance, and thirdly, it has long been established that you are a block of ice, while I am a flame..."

About the fact that the signals girl who had been greatly occupying his mind lately was named Olga, Minayev, of course, said nothing. Olga was a brave girl, but she always had a slightly frightened look on her face. Had it not been for that hectic July, Minayev would no doubt have told Olya that all sorts of things happen even in a war. But there was no time for lyrics here.... His sentiments found expression only in the fact that he would often shout: "Go to sleep at once, I'll stay at the 'phone."... He recalled her pale, freckled, childlike face and thought to himself: I shouldn't have blurted that about Lensky—it was too transparent....

Two hours later the attack was launched. They ran to the hollow and lay down—the Germans opened heavy fire. Osip's battalion had to occupy a low, bushy hill on the right. It was a hard day. The Germans brought up a fresh regiment, counter-attacked and reached the forest. At night Osip's battalion found itself cut off. At dawn, Minayev pushed forward again. Osip's men charged down from the hill. At eleven in the morning the Germans retreated to their second line of defence.

"Slowly, but accurately," said Osip (he had grown fond of that word).

Minayev answered teasingly:

"Everything with you is 'accurate.' 'Pon my word, you have become Fritzified..."

* 3 *

Sergei had become more restrained; living with others in that state of spiritual nakedness that comes from the imminence of death, he had learned to understand people better. But he was mistaken in believing that he no longer resembled the former Sergei—beneath that outward calm there was passion, impatience, swift changes from hope to disappointment.

It seemed to him that the offensive was petering out: We are marking time.... Is this going to be a repetition of February? At that time the same was said about Orel....

General Petryakov said to Sergei:

"Your time is coming—rivers..."

Sergei did not understand him. What rivers were there here? Rivulets like the Vytebet or the Rassvyeta. . . .

Petryakov laughed and added:

"The Desna, the Dnieper. And then the Vistula. . . ."

Sergei smiled—perhaps it was true? . . . I judge only by what I see—one army, perhaps less; for example, I have never been in Rykachov's outfit. . . . The General sees more of it than I do. Mama writes that the spirit in Moscow is splendid. Funny—we feel the war, we know what it smells like, but to see it you must look on from the outside. It is difficult, of course, for the people in the rear to appreciate the last ten minutes before an attack, but they can see the scale, the movement, the perspective.

Sergei was returning from the Army C.P.: his battalion was to be transferred. He was riding in a jeep; it had been raining continuously since the morning and he was drenched. All around there were ruins, overturned trucks, uprooted posts, barbed wire, the usual landscape of the fighting zone to which it is difficult to get accustomed; while you are fighting you don't see it, or rather, you see it, but you don't think about it; but you have only to see it with the eyes of an onlooker and it gives you the blues. Sergei was not thinking about anything; he just felt sad, it seemed as though neither this battered road nor the war would ever end.

The car stopped.

"There's no lubrication," said the driver.

Sergei had a look:

"Your piston rings are loose. . . ."

Suddenly he heard somebody speaking French. He looked round—several airmen were standing nearby. Two weeks ago somebody had said that the Normandy unit was taking part in the fighting for Orel. At that time we were piercing the German defences and Sergei had had no time for reminiscences. But at this instant a vision of Paris rose before him; on this miserable road he saw the lampposts in the Place de la Concorde, the obelisk, twittering girls, the fountain, the newspaper vendors; everything was brought to life—by the language, the intonation, the faces.

The driver said:

"Ask them for some lubrication, Comrade Major, and for some gas, I'm afraid we haven't enough to take us back. . . ."

The airmen led Sergei to a copse; one of them insisted on speaking Russian, comically mispronouncing the words. Sergei recalled the way Mado had said "k chortu poshlyot. . . ."

The airmen laughingly related how a Boche had landed on the aerodrome and was dumbfounded on seeing the Frenchmen, that a Russian general had sent them a present of a case of French champagne which had been captured from the Germans, and how they had cele-

brated the Fourteenth of July. They wondered how it was that a Russian major spoke French so well. Sergei stood and smiled: that was exactly how he remembered France, brave, merry and sad—the airmen's jests and laughter were tinged with bitterness—they had lost two of their comrades the day before.

"Don't you recognize me?" a tall, dark-eyed lieutenant asked Sergei. "You visited my father at Corbeille..."

Sergei was staggered. He wanted to embrace Louis and felt ashamed that he could not conceal his agitation.

"I am probably mistaken," said Louis.

"No, no! Please pardon me. I did not expect..."

"We have been here since the beginning of June. We have shot down thirty Boches... I am very glad to meet you—the first Parisian acquaintance I have met all the time I have been here."

Louis asked Sergei where he had been in action; on learning that he had been in Stalingrad he said:

"I dreamed of being there. We read about Stalingrad when we were in London and we were simply on tenterhooks... We arrived too late—in November... But things are not bad here, either; every day we escort assault planes" (he named the planes in Russian and pronounced it "Stormoviks").

Then Sergei asked Louis how he got to Russia. Louis frowned: he recalled the débâcle, Bordeaux, and the hot words with his father.

"While the 'phoney war' was on we were kept on the Swiss frontier. I left France immediately after the surrender and went to London. At first we did some fighting—the Boches bombed the city nearly every day... But for the past year we did nothing. For us, Frenchmen, this was hard to bear..."

"How are things in France now? Surely, not everybody has become reconciled..."

"Nobody has become reconciled. Except for a handful of traitors... One of our airmen escaped from there last autumn, and he says that Boches are killed there every day. And the Resistance is growing. He says the French people are unrecognizable..."

Louis then began to tell Sergei about the activities of the partisans: unconsciously he exaggerated, depicted France as he would have liked her to be.

"I have filled up, Comrade Major. It's splendid stuff!"

It was time to go... But Sergei had not enquired about the most important thing. Would not Louis say something about Mado?... But Louis talked about the Franc-Tireurs of Savoy, about a "Messer" which "dived into a cloud," and about "Stormoviks"—"Yesterday we smashed up a Boche column on the Orel-Karachev road..." At last Sergei screwed up his courage:

"Have you any news of your people?"

"Mama died when I was still in France. She saw the débâcle and it broke her heart. . . . Father. . . . Well, you know him. It is difficult for him to understand. . . ."

"And your sister?"

"Mado is married, I heard about it by chance. They are in Paris, taking part in the Resistance. . . ."

Sergei could not collect his thoughts. He did not hear the driver grumbling: "I know myself that the rings are loose but how can I get them replaced when you go chasing about every day?" Then it grew dark. Sergei wanted to think about Mado, but could not; but he was with her, as if it was she he had met in the wood. And when he did begin to think his thoughts became confused, they all came in a rush—reminiscences, pain, joy, resentment, and if he were asked at that moment whether he was happy or grieved, he would not have been able to say. Mado used to sing:

Soldier, your fortune you have found,

Soldier, your fortune you have lost. . . .

I do not know whether I have lost Mado or found her. . . . Of course I have found her! She is not only alive, she is with us. Mado in the underground—it is hard to imagine. And so the war is frightful everywhere. Why did I have any doubts about Mado? I thought she was a mollycoddle. At some moments she seemed alien to me. And yet she was nearer to me than I thought. It is not only that she has changed, or that the times are what they are; I myself was different before, there was much that I did not understand, I judged by outward appearances. But war rubs off the gilt, removes all integuments, it lays everything bare. . . . I did not understand Mado. I loved, but I did not know whom I loved. . . . If we were to meet now, everything would be different, we would find the necessary words. We would understand each other without words. . . . There! We have met in this wood, after everything—after separation, mutual suspicion, after the frightful ordeal of war. . . . When we walked together for the first time, there were also trees and rain. . . .

So Mado is married. She has forgotten me. . . . No, I am going crazy, I told her that we could never be together, I married, and now I am jealous. . . . It is good that she has found love, life. Why didn't I ask who her husband is? Perhaps an artist like herself? . . . They are fighting now. . . . It must be much harder for them—surrounded by the illusion of a peaceful life, indifference, treachery. It's a good thing Mado is not alone at a time like this. I say "good," but what do I feel? This is silly—worse, it is disgusting—I am jealous. . . . No, I don't want that! . . . I have my own life, Valya. That is the past. I must live for what is, for what will be. . . .

He now tried to free his mind of Mado, but could not. The headlights lit up the wet trees and Sergei felt that Mado was by his side. He

thought to himself: Ghastly to think that it is all irremediable! I never understood how it is possible to regret the past. Now I understand—you regret not what you did, but what you did not do. Why did it happen? Not because our feelings were not deep enough. I don't think love can be more ardent than ours was.... When we parted Mado said: "There will never be anything like it."... That was something more than love, but something was lacking—something binding and simple. Mado said that each of us would have our own life, but that would not pass away. She understood everything.... That's true. I have learned that she has a husband, and yet I am not pained. I have Valya. But that is something different—I have not been unfaithful to Mado, and she has not been unfaithful to me. One cannot be unfaithful to something like that.... It is night in Paris now, and rain is falling. Perhaps Mado is walking down a narrow side-street, as if she were in a forest, and a German is stealing up behind her.... But why did we part then? There was an inexplicable attraction and an equally inexplicable repulsion. Major Shileiko would say "not fated."... But fate depends upon man. This is fatalism.... But perhaps it is not?

The car stopped.

"There's no lubrication," said the driver gloomily. "As for the rings, I know myself they want replacing..."

Sergei grew alarmed: it was getting late. Luckily a motor truck soon appeared and he stopped it. A few minutes later he was animatedly conversing with the men; they were artillerymen. They said that fighting was in progress on the outskirts of Orel.

Soon the sky was lit up by a pink glare. Everybody shouted to make himself heard above the roar. Sergei thought of his meeting with Louis, and it seemed to him that this had not been four hours, but an infinitely long time ago. Only the raindrops on the branches, glistening at rare intervals when caught by the headlights, reminded him of Mado.

So we really are going to take Orel.... Sergei was now thinking not of Mado, but of the wide rivers that lay ahead—the Desna, the Dnieper and the Vistula....

* 4 *

When Sergei had gone, Louis thought to himself: Why did I tell him that Mado and Berty were in the Resistance? That entered my head when I read the notice about their marriage, a silly attempt at justification, that's all.... René told me that people like Berty have adapted themselves, and that he has seen Berty's name in the newspapers.... In that case, I don't understand anything. Father could believe Pétain, he always reasoned like a child. But I will never believe

that Mado has bound up her fate with a traitor! . . . Perhaps, over there, they think it is necessary to live somehow, that one acts as a shield for the other? It's all a frightful riddle. . . .

Louis and René often recalled the past, sometimes fondly, sometimes with anger; no matter what they were talking about—the pranks they played at school, the “phoney war,” the chagrin they had felt after the débâcle—they always reverted to the question: What happened to France? They tried to grasp what happened, but could not. One day Louis said: “If we returned, would we be unable to understand; would we be foreigners? . . .”

Could he have expressed his doubts to Sergei? Of course, Vlahov is a friend—one can see that he loves France; but after all, he is a stranger. . . . Probably, when he spoke about Stalingrad, he thought to himself: “But you surrendered without a fight. . . .” Let him know that there are genuine Frenchmen, here and in France! As for the traitors (can it really be true about Berty, I can't believe it, René must be mistaken!)—that is our private grief; you can't talk to strangers about it. . . .

Louis smiled: How much we have changed! Such things would never have entered my head before. . . . When the Russians speak about their country one can sense the pride they feel. Vlahov put Nivelle in his place at once. . . . Probably, they never joke about this even among themselves. . . . But did we ever pride ourselves on being Frenchmen? Nobody ever thought about it. We poked fun at France in comic songs, played the buffoon. When Mama asked me whether I seriously wanted to go to Tahiti, I answered that any place was more interesting than France. It was only in London that I realized what I lost. . . .

The Russians behave towards us better than the English do; the Russians are suffering great grief themselves, it is easier for them to understand us. . . . In England there were people who regarded us as mercenaries. But here everybody emphasizes that the “Normandy” is a separate unit of the Allied army. Perhaps this is politics too, I don't know, but I personally sense their friendship. They don't need us, anybody can understand that: what are a score of airmen, even if they are aces, in battles like these? But they welcomed us like comrades, gave us their “Yaks” and said: You can fight in our sky for your Paris.

When, during the “phoney war,” we were hanging around and wondering whether we would be sent into action or not, none of us understood what we were supposed to fight for. And yet we were in France then. . . . Now France is so far away it is difficult to picture her, but every one of us knows it is Paris we are fighting for. At one time aviation was an interesting form of sport for me—records to beat, and glory to gain in the event of war. Now even glory has lost its attraction, I am fighting for the simplest thing in the world—a house, a tree standing beside it—elm or alder—green window blinds, small, red roses,

buzzing humblebees. . . . Here everything is different—the trees, the houses, even the sky—it is pale. How long it is since I have seen tile-roofed houses with grey stone walls and wistarias clinging to them, the terrace of a small café, the blue syphons, schoolgirls in pinafores and women in black caps? . . .

Formerly, Louis had been afraid of appearing sentimental; the war had changed him, he was not ashamed to show René the handful of earth he had taken from his mother's grave and had carried through London, Syria and Ivanovo to this place near Orel. A handful of ordinary earth, but when looking at it Louis recalled the hills, the low myrtle tree that smelt of death, the deep blue southern sky.

Yes, here we are fighting for Paris. Will they not make a landing even now? . . . Another year has passed, the Boches have been smashed up at Stalingrad, here a gigantic battle has been raging for over two weeks. Why, then, are they hanging around in Sicily? . . . The Russians say that they want to come in at the finish. I can understand how the Russians feel about it—why, thousands of men are dying every day. . . . France, too, has grown tired of waiting—the Boches have been there for three years. . . . A good thing I went away: here I am nearer to France—I am fighting. . . .

Usually merry and boisterous, Louis felt so depressed that day that he was reluctant to meet his comrades, even René. His meeting with Sergei had opened the wound in his heart: the past rose before his eyes—his mother, Mado, Paris. I must go and have my dinner—we have been ordered to stand by our machines at eighteen hours. . . . He went to the messroom. Some newly made tables were standing under the trees; the tables smelt of pine. He was glad to see that nobody was there—he was late. . . . Klava scolded him:

"It will be suppertime soon. . . ."

"Don't be angry with me, Klava. I am half an hour late, but the Allies are a year late with their second front."

"You are always joking. . . ."

Klava could not restrain a smile. She was a plump, freckle-faced girl, with eyebrows so fair that you could not see them, and she had kind, grey eyes. She brought in the soup and the roast.

"Why don't you eat?"

He answered guiltily, like a child:

"I don't want to."

Louis spoke Russian better than the other Frenchmen. His comrades envied him: he could tell a Russian airman, without the aid of an interpreter, how he had chased a "Messer." The others spoke mainly by means of gestures and words that the Russians could understand, such as "pique," "virage." But Louis could even pronounce the word "khvost" (tail), which staggered all the Frenchmen. He often had talks with Klava, asked her about life in Russia and told her about France.

It pleased him to see that she listened to him attentively and he liked her exclamations of surprise: "You don't say!" or "Really!"

At first Klava could not understand what sort of people these Frenchmen were. On Christmas Eve they arranged a supper, had a few drinks and sang in chorus a song in a solemn tune that sounded like a hymn. Klava asked the interpreter: "What, are they praying?" The interpreter laughed: "No, it's a comic song. These are some of the words:

*Grandma gave me money to buy a pair of braces,
The money will be useful to spend upon the lasses. . . ."*

Klava flushed with indignation; she decided that the French were very coarse. When she got to know them better she said: No, it's not true. They just say whatever enters their heads, but they keep their hands to themselves. If they do try to flirt, they are very nice about it, nothing to take offence at. She liked the Frenchmen—they were a merry lot, neatly dressed—kept themselves tidy, and they were brave—our Colonel said they were good fighters, only they were reckless. . . . I can't understand why they were beaten so quickly in France. . . . Yesterday one of them failed to return. . . . His name was Pierre, that's the same as Pyotr in Russian; he had told Klava that in Russian his name was Pyotr Gastonovich. In the morning he had cracked jokes, had said that policemen in France were called "les vaches"—"cows," and had mooded so naturally that Lena came running out shouting: "How did a cow get here? . . ." He did not come back. . . . Klava could not sleep all night, thinking of Pierre.

Klava, perhaps, liked Louis better than the rest: he had such expressive eyes, and when he laughed you had to laugh with him even if you did not understand what it was about, and he spoke Russian. . . . He is sad today, for some reason. Klava sighed:

"You must eat, otherwise you'll have no strength. . . ."

"I don't feel like eating, Klava."

She sat down beside him and looking into his bright, black eyes, she asked him:

"Have you a wife in France?"

"No."

"Or a betrothed?"

He did not understand the word "nevesta," so she explained:

"A sweetheart."

"No. I have nobody. My mother died. I have only France now. . . ."

He thought what happiness it would be to die with the earth of France under one's feet, France with her hills, vineyards, slate or tiled roofs! . . . His eyes became still sadder.

"Don't grieve," said Klava. "When the war's over, you'll go home and you'll find a sweetheart. . . ."

Louis had not been spoilt by feminine tenderness. He gave the impression of being self-assured, even abrupt, but actually he was morbidly shy. When he took a liking to a girl he would begin to argue with himself that she was too stupid, or too clever—was afraid to remain alone with her in case he made himself ridiculous. He gazed at Klava admiringly—how feminine and tender she was! . . . He was overcome by a feeling of gratitude; he took Klava's broad, rough hand and kissed it. Klava, blushing like a peony, exclaimed:

"Don't!"

Just then René came running up:

"Major's orders. . . . You and I are to escort the 'Stormoviks'. . . ."

Louis was regarded as one of the best of the airmen. Within a short time he had accounted for three Boches. The Major merely reproved him for his excessive eagerness for battle, and this time too he said: "Remember, the task is not to chase the Boches, but to cover the 'Stormoviks.'"

Already that morning Louis had said to himself: if Klava is in the messroom and not Lena, then all will be well. He laughed: I am becoming more and more superstitious every day—I count the number of fir trees by the roadside, I am afraid to utter the word "tomorrow" before a flight, so as not to attract the evil eye, I think I touch wood even in my sleep. It's the same with Klava. . . . What a nice girl she is. . . . How good things could be in the world—but it's all the other way round. . . .

Louis and his opposite number covered four "Ils." They attacked a concentration of German trucks on the Bryansk road. Louis saw the Boches running for their lives. There were no enemy craft in the air, so he permitted himself the pleasure of doing a bit of storming on his own account. Suddenly six "Messers" and two "Fokkes" appeared from behind the clouds. Louis at once informed the "Stormoviks": superior enemy forces; return to base. The "Ils" proceeded in the centre; Louis and René refrained from giving the enemy battle for fear of leaving the "Ils" without cover. This was the hardest thing to bear for Louis; there was one thing he could not boast of, and that was coolness. Three "Messers" surrounded him. He pressed his trigger and saw one of the "Messers" catch fire and spin to the ground. The second "Messer" made off, while the third hung on to Louis' tail. René veered round and drove the "Messer" off. Later, two "Messers" and two "Fokkes" attacked Louis. His plane shuddered; he felt a sharp sting of pain. Everything vanished. He mustered all his strength: I must get the plane home. . . . No, I won't manage it. . . . I must. . . . He thought he saw the tiled roofs and the vineyards of France below him.

René shot down one of the "Fokkes" and safely returned to the base. He reported to the Major:

"Lancier downed a Boche, after that he was surrounded, he in-

creased his altitude and the Boche went after him. I think he must have landed somewhere. . . .”

The Major gave orders for the field to be prepared for night landing. René waited all night, but Louis did not turn up. Next morning a report was received that tankists had discovered the wreckage of a “Yak” bearing the French tricolour ten kilometres from the aerodrome.

They buried Louis in the same copse in which he had met Sergei. There were many birches in the copse, white and slender, too white and slender, perhaps, for such an age. . . . The Russian Colonel said over the grave: “Sleep in peace, comrade-in-arms,” and the word “comrade” made everybody feel sadder, so much feeling was there in it. The airmen stood around the grave, and each thought of the distant land where he had grown up, played and loved. They saw visions of French cemeteries with cypruses, myrtle, roses, groves of silvery olives, poplars and fig trees. One of the airmen pointed to a birch tree and said: “Like those in my home town, Sologne.”. . . René was the last to step towards the grave; he dropped on to the body of his friend the handful of earth which Louis had brought from France. A farewell salute was fired.

Klava laid a large bunch of wild flowers on the grave. That evening she wept for a long time in her dugout. Why do I feel so sorry for him? More, it seems to me, than if he were one of our own. . . . Perhaps, because it is terrible to die far from one’s home? . . . He said that he had no wife, nor a sweetheart, that he had only France. And he did not see France again. . . .

* 5 *

It is said that the regular order of existence, the strict rules of everyday life and the calmness of those around one, help one to bear the bitterest grief. Natasha was sustained by something different—by the tragedy of events, by the bitterness everywhere in nineteen forty-one and nineteen forty-two, by life that was unlike life. A month ago she had felt a resurgence of anxiety: when the reports appeared that the Germans had launched an offensive, everybody was on tenterhooks. In March the Germans captured Kharkov. Would they succeed again? . . . Natasha knew that Dmitri Alexeyevich was somewhere near Kursk. Her anxiety did not last long; a week later nobody talked about Kursk any more, everybody waited to see how the offensive against Orel would end. Dmitri Alexeyevich wrote Natasha: “I have seen their ‘Tigers.’ I can imagine the time and money it must cost to produce such a monster, and yet it was wrecked by Gorokhov, who worked in a poultry farm before the war; I operated on him yesterday—for appendicitis.”. . .

Natasha had returned to Moscow in the spring. Gradually, the city resumed its peacetime appearance; many theatres were reopened, and more automobiles appeared in the streets. Some people, having calmed down, resumed their ordinary private affairs: there was talk about apartments—some were evicted, others moved in; after a two years' interval, kitchen quarrels were resumed; the markets flourished and the commission stores began to trade again. And by the side of these, people who were connected with the front by their consciences, their hearts and their blood, continued their superhuman labours; and it was impossible to understand the offensive against Orel unless one looked into the houses of Moscow. In the factories women strained themselves lifting heavy loads; during the recess children played with wheelbarrows—they were children and could not help playing; old folks taught the legless and armless. Moscow weltered in the sweat of war. Natasha's neighbour, Maria Nikolayevna, who worked at a munitions plant, never got enough sleep, nor did Natasha for that matter; when they met they looked at each other with dull, inflamed eyes in which the will struggled with mortal weariness.

Natasha's return to her native city, where she had grown up, had lived with her mother, had played in the sandpit in the Gogol Boulevard and later had gone to school, to the city in which she had met Vasya, caused her to feel her grief with renewed intensity. She had given up all hope, and when her father wrote to her about the partisan units, she thought: he wants to comfort me. . . . She knew that Vasya was dead, but her love did not subside, on the contrary, it burned with a brighter flame than ever, and at times she asked herself: is it possible to love one who is dead like this? . . .

In her room she found Vasya's notes to her and his notebook with drawings—he had forgotten them that winter when he went to Minsk. Every trifle reminded her of her bereavement: an empty chocolate box (Vasya had bought her the chocolates on her birthday. Too shy to give them to her, he had hidden the box among the books. For some time she could not guess who had brought them, and she had teased him about it for a long time afterwards), a broken vase (in his excitement during a heated argument about whether there could be such a thing as an "ideological ballet," Vasya had upset the whatnot). . . .

What children we were then, thought Natasha, recalling her long conversations with Vasya. One evening they discussed the question of death. Natasha said that the consciousness that death is inevitable makes life harder; to this Vasya rejoined: "scientists are fighting death." On another occasion Natasha said that she was afraid of grief, "it is so easy to become a pessimist." . . . They read a great deal, thought about what they had read, but they had no idea what life was like. . . .

Her friends often told her that she had grown better looking, that she was unrecognizable. But she had changed not only outwardly. Gorev

arrived from the front. He used to visit the Krylovs before the war, and then Natasha had seemed a little girl to him. He fell in love with her now and asked himself—how is it I did not notice before that she has an unusual character? And she is altogether unusual!... He was a philologist, a major in the artillery, a man of intellect and peculiar in his way—brave in battle, but timid in affairs of the heart. It was not until the eve of his departure that he screwed up courage to express his sentiments. Natasha took his hand and said tenderly but firmly: "Don't." He blushed to the roots of his hair; he imagined that Natasha thought him dishonourable. But on bidding him farewell Natasha embraced him and said: "Don't be angry with me, I cannot act otherwise. You are a good friend—that is why I am saying it."... She knew she would not know happiness again, not because she was virtuous, faithful to the memory of her husband, but because such a thing does not repeat itself, all that could have been had already been with Vasya.

Natasha now understood that grief does not kill, that one can grieve and live, that grief awakens new potentialities, elevates the spirit. Surgeons, nurses and patients regarded Natasha as a laughter-loving girl and said that nobody was able to spread warmth and comfort as well as she could. If Maria Nikolayevna did not receive letters from her husband for a long time she came to Natasha, and Natasha would assure her that she would certainly receive a letter next day, or the day after, and that absolutely nothing had happened to Pyotr Ivanovich. But when, comforted by Natasha, Maria Nikolayevna went out, Natasha would begin to meditate over that greatest of all enigmas—death. So we have got to resign ourselves to it?... Or comfort ourselves, as Vasya used to do, with the hope that the scientists will discover immortality?... Before, everything was simple—grandmother believed in life after death.... But perhaps there is no such thing as a separate, individual fate? It is awful to die when you are living within yourself and for yourself. If a forest is alive, a tree does not cease to exist when it dies.... I am glad that Maria Nikolayevna received a letter yesterday; I am glad that she is happy because it is also my happiness.... The Germans have been repulsed from Kursk.... Little Vasya is growing....

Natasha did not realize what a support little Vasya was for her. She believed that she no longer had a personal life of her own, but when she took her son in her arms she was overwhelmed with joy, and she smiled that vague, confused smile that Vasya once saw. Natasha often recalled what Vasya had said in burning Minsk: "We shall be together—forever."... That June night lived in spite of everything—in Natasha's heart, and in every one of little Vasya's gestures. Natasha would talk to him for quite a long time, and when he smiled it seemed to her that he understood everything, that he was aware of his right to smile, to breathe, to live. What will his life be like? It is impossible

to believe that there will be fascists, bombs and fierce, black hatred in twenty years' time! . . .

Work at the hospital continued to take up much time and much spiritual strength. The war situation had changed, the Germans no longer threatened Moscow; but shells, mortar shells and bombs continued to mutilate people. When she put on her overall, Natasha stepped into a world that had become habitual to her; here the war assumed the form not of strategy, not the ardour of battle, not laborious toil, but only of unceasing human suffering.

Airman Ryazantsev was brought in. He was wounded in the head. Another patient told Natasha that Ryazantsev had been escorting bombers in the region of Bryansk; a shell hit his plane and set it on fire; the airman succeeded in landing the burning plane within our lines. They trepanned Ryazantsev's skull; the surgeon said he would pull through. He was raving in delirium: "I veered. . . Tiny! Cover me! . . . Yashka is rolling. . . Fall into line. . ." Later on he shouted: "Mashenka! Drive that bee away, it will sting you in a minute! They can smell those flowers. . . Where do all these gillyflowers come from? . . ." But there was no Tiny, no Mashenka and no gillyflowers, there were only the white hospital walls and Natasha, who was making an effort to smile to Ryazantsev—it seemed to her that Vasya was lying there. . . . She sat at his bedside until the morning; in the morning he died.

The artillery salute took Natasha by surprise; she had not heard the order of the day. Maria Nikolayevna shouted: "That's for Orel. . . . Look! How beautiful! . . ." The crash made little Vasya wake up with a roar; Natasha took him in her arms and he became quiet. The scene was indeed beautiful: green and red rockets soared into the sky and then died out, and each time one of them, like a wandering star, lingered, did not want to die. Natasha even clapped her hands. Little Vasya laughed. Then Natasha pictured to herself the scene at the front—the rockets were different there, and the guns did not roar like that; like that, and yet not like that. . . . At this moment somebody was dying. . . . A green rocket glared over the roofs of the houses. Natasha recalled Ryazantsev's feverish eyes. Another salvo and more rockets. . . . We have captured Orel: isn't that splendid? And Natasha repeated that word aloud: "splendid. . . ."

Then darkness and silence ensued—it seemed as though it had not been so quiet, and the night had not been so deep and dark before the salute was fired. For a moment Natasha's heart sank—there will be no happiness. . . . But she soon overcame her depression; she went in to her neighbour and said cheerfully:

"It was very beautiful, even Vaska appreciated it. . . . It will all be over soon, Maria Nikolayevna, you'll see. It's not only that we have captured Orel; the Germans are reaching the end of their tether. . . . Pyotr Ivanovich will be home soon, I'm convinced of it. . . ."

Next morning she wrote to Dmitri Alexeyevich:

"DEAR PAPA, They saluted you too. I was standing at the window with Vaska and saw it all, it was very beautiful, it seemed to express all that everyone felt. When one heart beats you can't hear it; but those guns spoke for us all. And so we have lived to see happiness, Papa! . . ."

* 6 *

Osip was smiling, everything delighted him—the white huts, the black nights, the Ukrainian way of pronouncing "g" like "h," and the fact that they were drawing nearer to Kiev every day. The Germans tried to check the offensive, but in vain. Sometimes their retreat was so hurried that they had no time to burn the houses and drive the inhabitants away. The men saw living villages, girls with roguish and tender eyes, and hospitable housewives who regaled their guests with home-brew, cream and boiled pumpkin, and told them how the arrogant Germans had begun to sigh and pray to God.

One old woman kept making the sign of the cross at the passing tanks, artillery and trucks. She said: "I have been standing here since the morning and they keep on coming and coming, and yet the Germans said that the Russians had no soldiers." . . . Yesterday's "sons-in-law" now claimed to be partisans. The genuine partisans came out of the forests, and gazing at them, Osip felt his eyes becoming moist from the wave of happiness that swept over him.

Then came the wilderness: the German "torch bearers" left nothing. At night the glare of burning villages was seen far around. It was difficult to breathe owing to the fumes. Cows, which the Germans had shot, lay in the fields with enormous swollen bellies. Here and there the inhabitants returned to their gutted villages. The women related: "We saw the Germans rushing about like mad, so we hid from the parasites in the hemp fields." . . . In one village Osip found an old man in the cemetery: the Germans had burned everything and had driven the inhabitants away; the only one left was this old man with the heavy eyebrows of a wizard, sick and tired of the world. In another village Osip saw felled apple trees, their leaves, which had not yet had time to fade, were still trembling on their branches, and the large waxen apples seemed to be ripening in the August sun. These deliberately felled trees were more horrible to see than the gutted homes; Osip turned away, heartsick at the blindness of human rage.

Wounded Sergeant Seletsky refused to go to the battalion hospital base; he said to Osip: "I want to drive them out." . . . That is what everybody was living for now—to drive them out. Weariness and heartache were forgotten; the men trembled with the fever of joy, wrath and impatience.

It was believed that the Germans would attempt to make a stand on the Desna—a broad river with a steep right bank. It was said that the "Eastern Wall," about which the Germans had repeatedly written in their leaflets, ran through there. Lieutenant-Colonel Medvedev had received an appointment at Army Headquarters and Osip was now in command of the regiment. He went to Minayev's battalion to find the best spot at which to force the river. After a long search they discovered a suitable spot: a sharp declivity in the bank, at the bottom of which ran a narrow strip of sand; here they decided to put up moorings. The sappers hauled up telephone posts and logs and knocked up rafts with them. They crossed the Desna so quickly that the Germans were thrown into confusion and the battle was short.

Minayev was sitting on a bench—down below was the Desna, around him the ruins of Chernigov. The Germans had already destroyed the city in nineteen forty-one, and the heaps of bricks, overgrown with grass, flowers and low scrub, looked like ancient ruins. Rome.... Only rusty signboards, here and there, reminded one that not so long ago this city had lived; here there had been a library, and there a wine and fruit store.... It was a warm, early autumn day. The leaves of the chestnut trees were of a golden hue. Minayev smiled—how much pleasanter it was to gaze at the Desna after you have crossed it.... He had never been in the Ukraine before, and the rich colours and distinct contours of the landscape, unusual to the eye of a northerner, charmed him.

Later Minayev went for a stroll through the boulevard. He saw Olya. She was sitting alone, also admiring the view. He sat down beside her and wanted to chaff her, but could not think of what to say. Funny, he thought, I'm supposed to be the biggest chaffer in the regiment. Only yesterday Osip called me "the Shchedrin of our army" and yet with Olya, this Shchedrin is behaving like a calf....

He sat down beside her and began to draw designs on the sand with a dry twig. Then he took out his handkerchief and wiped his face, surprised that he felt hot, although the weather was cool. At last he said:

"A beautiful view...."

Olya answered "Yes" and remained on her guard, wondering whether the Captain wanted to make fun of her. Everybody was afraid of Minayev—he had such a sharp tongue, and Olya was more afraid of him than anybody because, as she confessed to herself, she liked the Captain "awfully." Olya was nineteen; before the war she had fallen in love repeatedly—with a teacher of history, with an actor at the Vakh-tangov Theatre, and with a perky university student; it would be more true to say that she thought she was in love; she wrote in her diary: "this time it is the fateful meeting," or "all the evening he danced with Varya, but I am proud, and I shall never forgive him for that," and a month later she wrote in the margin of her notebook: "All this is childish, a momentary infatuation, nothing more."... Yes, before the

war she longed to be really in love, for love in books had been so lofty and mysterious. But there had been no time for dreams at the front; and what she had seen had cooled her desire for love: signals girl Lyuda had lived first with Major Koshkaryov and then with Lieutenant Nestorov. Captain Zolotukhin chummed up with nurse Abramtseva: he said he had a wife and children in Yaroslavl to whom he would return after the victory and that the nurse was his—"war friend." These wives—for a month, or a year, were called "camp wives" and people cracked nasty jokes about them. Olya's mother had written her that Kovrigin's wife had gotten herself a new husband and was saying: "that one may be killed; this one is in the rear and is well provided for."... Disgusting! If that's what love is, better do without it... What was good about Captain Minayev was that he paid no attentions to women. And in general, he was a very clever man. Major Alpert was right when he said: "He is the most cultured officer in the regiment."... There was one thing bad about the Captain, though: when he flings one of his jokes at you, you go about feeling as if you have been scalded, but a minute later he has forgotten what he said...

Minayev had no inkling that he had vanquished Olya's heart; he sat beside her in embarrassed silence. He wanted to tell her that he was not a thoughtless boy or a highfaluting phrasemonger, that he really liked Olya, but he did not know how to put it. Romantic incidents, comic stories, verses by Lermontov and Heine passed through his mind, but they were all inappropriate. He was afraid of offending Olya. They were often alone in the blindness or dugout and Minayev wanted to say something affectionate to her, but he had not the courage to do so. The "Shchedrin of our army" was exceedingly shy, and perhaps he joked so often because, at bottom, he was so shy. But suddenly, whether it was because the Desna had been crossed, or because of the beauty of the landscape that spread before them, he, to Olya's, and his own surprise, said:

"Do you know what, Olyenka? When the war's over, and if I'm still alive, and you have no objection, we'll go and get married. What do you think?..."

Olya blushed: She knew it would be like that! The Captain guessed how she felt about him and now he was making fun of her! She got up.

"May I go, Comrade Captain?"

"Fool that I am," said Minayev to himself later. "Why did I think that she would consent? She is a fine girl and probably has a dozen admirers. But what am I? On a battalion scale I am still somebody; when the war is over Comrade Minayev will be something between a half-trained lawyer and a games leader in some provincial Park of Culture. And besides, I have a nose like a turkey cock and absolutely can't dance, no wonder the girl went off in a huff. And the foolish way I said it! Like saying: 'When the war's over, let's go to the movies.'... It's a

pity though. I don't think I'll find another like her; there are plenty of girls around, of course, but you have to search all your life to find one that you really like. It can't be helped; let's return to current business, and the immediate job ahead is to get to Berlin. After that I'll be able to meditate on the vanity of bachelor life."

Minayev poked fun at himself, but he was far from being in a jocular mood. Chernigov now seemed cast in gloom; its ruins now looked tragic. Those skunks have not left a single town standing! The newspapers write: "We shall avenge!"... as if it will make me feel any better if we burn some German town!...

A week later he was sitting in a hut reading a newspaper. Olya was on duty at the telephone. This was the first time after his unfortunate proposal that they were alone together. Minayev said:

"Funny—the Germans have kidnapped Mussolini. They have lost Italy, so they want at least to preserve the Duce. . . ." Then, in a different tone of voice he suddenly asked: "Tell me the truth, Olya, are you angry with me?"

Olya blushed, and when she blushed you couldn't help noticing it. At school they used to tease her and say: "You can't tell a lie," and she would answer indignantly: "I am not telling a lie; it's my complexion." . . . She could barely restrain herself from running out of the hut. Minayev could not tear his eyes away from her. At last she said in a whisper:

"Why do you tease me?"

He stepped up to her.

"I am not teasing you, Olya. Happiness is teasing me. . . ."

Later they could not remember how it all happened. Probably Minayev had stroked Olya's hand. Or perhaps, to hide her agitation, she had buried her face in his shoulder. "When the war's over you will throw me up," Olya said suddenly.

"Look at me, Olyenka. Am I the sort that throws a girl up? The truth is, I'm the sort that girls throw up. . . . But you and I will be different—we won't throw each other up: firstly, lofty sentiments, and all that; secondly, you and I have been fighting side by side for a whole year. Maybe we shall still have to. . . . I think you can drop the formal 'you' when speaking to me and say 'thou,' and in general, why should we wait until Hitler shouts 'Hitler kaputt'? . . ."

When Minayev went to the C.P. to see Osip he debated with himself: "Shall I tell him I am getting married, or will it be best not to say anything about it?"

Osip was unusually excited:

"Our army is being transferred to the First Ukrainian Front. Do you realize what that means? We shall take part in the offensive against Kiev, that's what it means! The direction now is Pakul-Pasyeka. And then—the Dnieper. . . . We've reached the turning point, that's evident.

The spirit of the Fritzes is no longer what it was. And our men's spirit has changed too.... A private said to me today: 'I'm in a hurry.' I asked him: 'What's the hurry,' and he answered: 'It's time we finished up.'... The Fritzes hope to winter on the Dnieper; I don't think we'll let them. It looks as if the end is coming...."

"It certainly is," said Minayev. "I'll bring you additional proof from quite another quarter—I have decided to get married. What, don't you believe me? It's quite definite. You know the girl—it's Olya."

Osip was dumbfounded. Why, yes, of course. There is a girl named Olya, red-haired, I think.... But why "marry"?

Minayev seemed to guess his thoughts:

"This is the best proof of what you say. Could I have thought of doing this a year ago—on that damned mound?... If anybody had told me then that in a year's time I would propose to a girl in the regulation way. I would have sent him to hell.... I was thinking of funerals rather than of weddings then. It was you who said 'turning point.'... Do you approve of my choice?"

"Why not? She is a serious girl, I think. But on the whole, it's a surprise.... You used to make fun of everybody and boast that you were not tied to anybody—and suddenly, bang!... Twixt the Desna and the Dnieper.... Like a novel...."

When Minayev left, the idea struck Osip for the first time that the war would really end, that he would return to Kiev. Raya would come home. and Mama and Alyenka. Perhaps Mama is dead. Raya does not answer when I ask her how Mama is. Of course, it is hard for Mama to live through an experience like this—the exodus, the life of an evacuee. Sixty-four—not the age to go through a thing like that.... Suddenly Osip was terrified by the thought that Raya was at the front. Until today this had seemed natural to him, but now he thought with an aching heart: It is natural that I should fight, but why Raya?... He longed for ordinary happiness—to know that when the war ended he would find his wife, his home. Unless you knew that it was hard to fight.... Perhaps it was what Minayev had told him that had roused these disturbing thoughts—woman, affection and comfort had invaded the world of war. But perhaps it was the proximity of Kiev that had disturbed his heart? Yesterday, the Commander-in-Chief had said: "It won't be long now."... Yes, Kiev is quite near.... We, of course, are going more to the north, to Chernobyl, but still, it is near.... He measured the distance with his fingernail on the two-kilometre map. But his heart would not be appeased. Everything reminded him of his native city—the trees, the dialect, the stars. He saw a vision of the steep street up which he had walked with Raya. Would they really go to the park together again?... Raya had said as her long eyelashes fluttered: "What has Yashchenko to do with it? Can I tell him how much I love you? You don't understand anything, not a thing!..." And it was true—

there was a lot he did not understand at that time, everything proceeded as if according to plan. Actually, things were far more complicated. . . . He learned more during the three months he was at Stalingrad than he had learned during the preceding thirty years. . . . If only nothing happened to Raya! We shall never part again. . . . If we live through all this, we must not part again, not even for a day. . . .

Minayev was sitting with his head slightly inclined to the side and writing:

"DEAR MUM,

"Congratulate me—during the past week we covered a hundred kilometres. Of course, the Germans covered as much, but they would not take it kindly if you congratulated them on it. Yesterday I asked a Fritz what he thought about the future, and he answered that he could not think because he had blisters on his feet. But I not only think about the future, I have even got married. Don't think it is a silly, frontline love affair; Olya is the most serious girl I have ever met, she is almost an Academician, all she lacks is a thesis and a pair of spectacles. She is a high-school graduate and intended to enter the Pedagogical Institute, but by the will of fate and of Hitler she became a signals girl. I am sure you will like her, everybody likes her, and besides, she said to me today that I only pretend to be a humorist—which is what you are fond of saying. Dear Mum, we shall both come barging in on you soon! I shall do all in my power to prevent the Führer from being kidnapped as the Duce was; if the worst comes to the worst, I'll have to kill him. Dear Mum, you can expect your foolish Mitya and his by no means foolish other half in the very near future!"

He went out and asked an old peasant:

"How many kilometres is it to Pakul?"

A jolly looking tankist was standing next to the peasant. He sprang to attention, saluted, and said in a serious tone:

"Comrade Captain. Grandad and I were just calculating how many kilometres it is to Berlin! . . ."

* 7 *

On Wednesday, September the eighth, the new school term commenced, one week late. The headmaster, Alexei Nikolayevich Steshenko, delivered a speech: "Having now been drawn into the sphere of European culture, we shall endeavour to justify the confidence the Führer has placed in us and train reapers for the field of education tilled by glorious German arms." . . . He had written the speech out in advance, but for all that he stammered from agitation. "Thank God that's over," he said, heaving a deep sigh as he left the school. At the corner of the boulevard Levshin, the dentist, approached him:

"Have you heard the news? . . . But you must keep it a profound secret. . . . The Commandant of the railway station has just told me, I was putting a crown on his tooth. . . . They have begun to evacuate. . . ."

From that moment Alexei Nikolayevich lost his peace of mind. It seemed to him that something was gripping at his throat, he could not swallow, he could not breathe. He read the communiqué for the tenth time "Fighting on both sides has assumed unprecedented ferocity. . . . Notwithstanding their numerical superiority in men and arms, the Soviets have nowhere succeeded in piercing the German front. . . . Where movements were made to avoid battle, they were carried out in perfect order after all important objectives had been destroyed. . . . The coal mines of the Donets Basin have been completely wrecked and our forces have withdrawn from the region according to plan. . . . The Third Battalion of the Seventieth Grenadier Regiment, under the command of Oberleutnant Kecht, has particularly distinguished itself." . . . That's how they all write when things are going badly. . . . It is evident that the Germans are getting it in the neck. . . . Yushchenko told me yesterday that the Bolsheviks were in Konotop, but I wouldn't believe it; evidently it's true since the Germans have begun to evacuate. Perhaps the Reds are already in Bakhmach, who knows? . . . It's all right for a fellow like Oberleutnant Kecht—he will scoot and be decorated for it in the bargain. . . . But what's going to happen to me? . . . I have no one to go to for advice. Some will run to the Gestapo and say I am sowing panic. Others. . . . the others are waiting for the Reds, they will say "there's nothing to be scared about, remain here." and later they will hang me. . . . And Tonya is dead. . . .

Antonina Petrovna died in May. One morning, she prepared breakfast, ironed a white duck jacket for her husband, sighed, as usual, that she would not see Valya any more, and then lay down on the couch and said: "Give me a drink of water, Lyosha, I feel sick." . . . When he brought her a glass of water, she was already unconscious; she died before the doctor arrived. Alexei Nikolayevich was aware that people do not die of grief, that Tonya had suffered from heart disease; but for all that he thought that his wife had "eaten her heart out," that, had it not been for this "mess up" (as he mentally called the war), his wife would have lived another twenty years.

Alexei Nikolayevich had been supercilious towards his wife: what does she know about politics? Now he said to himself: Tonya was right; the Germans made a fool of me. . . .

He had always detested the Bolsheviks. But who knew about it? Only his wife. He had never said anything derogatory about them even in Valya's presence; the most he would permit himself was to poke fun at Mayakovsky's poetry, or at Osip's accent. Of course, Antonina Petrovna was aware of her husband's attitude towards the Soviet system, but she too had disapproved of the "innovations." How is it to be ex-

plained that husband and wife, who had lived together for thirty years, should fall out with each other just when harmony was particularly needed? It began in the first weeks of the war. Antonina Petrovna insisted that they should go with the evacuees and try and find Valya. Alexei Nikolayevich shouted: "What! Sleep on straw? No, thank you! The Bolsheviks' days are over. Let them scoot, we have nothing to fear. . . ." But Antonina Petrovna kept on repeating: "In times like these we must be with Valya." . . . Her husband replied: "Nonsense. It will all be over by the winter." . . .

The Germans came. Alexei Nikolayevich was staggered by the number of tanks and trucks, by the smartness of the officers and the merry laughter of the men: real conquerors. He meditated over his past life and realized that he had not lived as he had wanted to live. He had dreamed of becoming a professor, but what was he? A schoolteacher, dragging out a miserable existence. A fellow like Alpert carried more weight than he did. . . . And he was fed up with the meetings, theses, Marxism, salary deductions. . . . A good thing all this was done with now!

When Hannah shouted on leaving the house: "My foot will never cross this threshold again!" Antonina Petrovna said to her husband: "Why were you rude to her? What is she to blame for?" To this Alexei Nikolayevich replied: "For being the mother of a Bolshevik." . . . Then they heard about what happened at Bahby Yar. Antonina Petrovna wept and kept on repeating: "God will punish us for this. . . ." This made Alexei Nikolayevich angry. What's God to do with it? Tonya never went to church. And above all—what have we to do with it? I was not present at Bahby Yar. . . .

For a moment he hesitated—he recalled his young days, when every now and again a new government was set up in Kiev—first the Hetman, then the Petlyuraites, then the Bolsheviks, after them the Denikinites, and after them the Bolsheviks again. . . . It was dangerous to stake everything on the Germans—who knew how it would all turn out? . . . But the fighting line soon shifted away from Kiev, the Germans reached the approaches to Moscow, they surrounded Leningrad, and Alexei Nikolayevich became firmly convinced that Hitler would triumph. He accepted an appointment in the city administration, became headmaster of a school, delivered speeches and began to write for the local newspaper over the *nom de plume* of "Mazepaite." When the Germans reached the Caucasus the previous summer he said to his wife triumphantly: "Who was right?" To this she replied tearfully: "Where is Valya now? . . ."

Antonina Petrovna kept quiet, but her husband was conscious of her disapproval. One day, after reading an article he had written entitled "The Red Army's Death Dance," she said: "That's too bad, Alyosha. . . . After all, whatever they may be, they are ours." . . . He flew into a rage and shouted that he would have no "Cheka talk" in his

house. That had been in the previous autumn, six months before Antonina Petrovna died.

Tonya died in time, Alexei Nikolayevich now thought to himself. She knew nothing about politics, of course, but women have a peculiar intuition. I should have taken her advice. I could have gone with the evacuees. I could have remained here and have kept quiet. The Reds won't do anything to Levshin, and yet he has lived in clover under the Germans: treated the teeth of Gestapo men, grabbed right and left and swiped Dr. Mendelevich's piano. But he never expressed any opinions.... Why did I push myself forward? ... Wise after the event.... I would like to see the people who had doubts about Germany's victory in the summer of nineteen forty-two! There were some fanatics, of course, who scattered leaflets and even shot at Germans. But they are politicians, people like that go to the gallows as naturally as I go to school. Ordinary people like myself tried to make acquaintances among the Germans, to get the apartment of a former responsible official, or to get hold of furniture that had belonged to Jews. All I did was tell Ropp that I had been persecuted by the Bolsheviks—and that set the wheels rolling—they appointed me headmaster, invited me to an official gathering, put my signature to a telegram of thanks.... And now the Reds will hang me. What can I say in my defence? They will not believe that I hate the Germans. But it is true. The Germans looked down on us, they were rude to us, behaved as if they were at home. They will go away and leave us to our fate.... They are interested in some Oberleutnant, but they don't care a hang about me....

In the evening Yushchenko came in and said that the Reds had been checked, that the Germans would not surrender Kiev under any circumstances—the “Eastern Wall” ran along the Dnieper—the day before the family of a German specialist arrived, so all the talk about evacuation was false.... Alexei Nikolayevich cheered up. He took the newspaper to bed with him and read an article about labour mobilization: “Our boys and girls are being given the opportunity to visit the best country in the world—Great Germany.”... They were drafting those who were born in nineteen twenty-seven. Alexei Nikolayevich laughed: they'll send Levshin's daughter. Let him not think that he has outwitted everybody. What particularly comforted Alexei Nikolayevich was a review of a German film entitled “White Lilac.” They are interested in love as if nothing had happened.... No, Germany is a power—the Bolsheviks will never be able to cope with her!

Ten feverish days passed: Alexei Nikolayevich watched the railway station to see whether the Germans were going or coming; feeling reassured he would roam the commission stores in quest of a decent fur cap. It was the same Yushchenko who staggered him with the news:

“The Bolsheviks are in Nyezhin....”

Just before that Alexei Nikolayevich had been strolling along the

boulevard thinking what a beautiful autumn it was. Suddenly everything was plunged in gloom. Obviously, Yushchenko was right—it was enough to look at the German trucks. They are scooting. . . .

He went to the Kommandatur, he had an acquaintance there—Lieutenant Ropp.

“Give me a pass for Germany. . . .”

Lieutenant Ropp answered:

“I am sorry, but that is impossible just now. . . .”

“But you are evacuating the city.”

“I did not expect this of you, Herr Steshenko. You are spreading panicky rumours. . . .”

Alexei Nikolayevich lost his temper:

“So you are throwing me away? Like a squeezed lemon. . . .”

Lieutenant Ropp shrugged his shoulders:

“I know you are a respectable man and so I attach no importance to what you are saying. . . .”

The German women left. Files, pictures, ancient books and provisions were taken away. Then the employees of “Wikado,” the Sonderführers and the representatives of commercial firms began to disappear. The commission stores and the cafés closed. There was no need now to enquire where the Reds were—they were opposite, in Darnitsa. Alexei Nikolayevich found himself in the fighting line. Neither shells nor bombs frightened him. The Bolsheviks were coming—he could think of nothing else. Just as had been the case on that alarming day when Levshin told him that the Germans were about to evacuate the city, spasms gripped his throat.

Levshin announced that he intended to stay: “Whatever happens, I have no inclination to go traipsing around the world,” he said. Yushchenko went to Zhitomir. On bidding him farewell, Alexei Nikolayevich said: “Do you think there are no trees in Zhitomir? What does it matter where you hang?” . . .

It was foolish to go to Zhitomir, or even to Rovno. If the Bolsheviks cross the Dnieper, they can reach the frontier. Now, Dudnik did a wise thing—he went to Germany. The Bolsheviks will never get there. . . . But as far back as nineteen forty-two Dudnik had procured a certificate to the effect that he is a German—that’s the whole point. If only I could get a certificate like that! . . .

Alexei Nikolayevich acted with the energy that comes of despair; he went to the Kommandatur every day and at last secured an interview with Major Risst. The Major was polite, but he advised him to go to Zhitomir. Salvation came when Alexei Nikolayevich had given up all hope: Kovalenko, a stage hand, told him that a certain Tsanders was supplying certificates of German nationality: “He won’t take paper money, but if you have any valuables.” . . . Alexei Nikolayevich still had his wife’s pendant—turquoise and pearls—a wedding gift from her

mother. Tonya in heaven has saved me, thought Alexei Nikolayevich as he gazed at the longed-for certificate. He had to go to Rovno. Kovalenko told him that from there it was easy to get into Germany with a certificate like that.

With difficulty he squeezed into a car of a suburban train; he managed to get a seat; he closed his eyes and terrible weariness overcame him; he listened dispassionately to the thunder of artillery, to the weeping of women and to the shouting of the soldiers. Later some Germans entered the car:

"Get out!"

Alexei Nikolayevich was slow in getting up. One of the Germans hit him and bawled:

"Look alive, old horse! . . ."

The Sergeant said:

"This train is for the military. You will go tomorrow. . . ."

Alexei Nikolayevich plodded his way homeward. He looked round with surprise at the room in which he had lived for sixteen years and sat down on the edge of a chair like a shy guest. I will have to wait until tomorrow. . . . But what will happen tomorrow? According to this certificate I am a German, but I have not learned to speak German properly. Who needs me there? I will die of starvation. . . . The Germans don't care a hang. . . . Stand at the street corner, perhaps, and beg for alms? At fifty-seven! I might have been a professor. Even under the Bolsheviks I was a schoolteacher and was awarded a testimonial. . . .

A large, framed photograph of Valya stood on a small table. Valya was smiling, and she looked so pretty that it made Alexei Nikolayevich heave a deep sigh. My daughter is a student and may become a famous actress, but the Germans see no difference between a drunken village elder and a pedagogue of thirty years' standing. . . . Valya will repudiate me, that's evident; she's a member of the Young Communist League and her husband a member of the Party. . . . And Tonya is dead. There is a depression in the bed—that's from her body. . . . Nothing left—neither dear ones, nor a home. . . . Where shall I go? And why?

He recalled how that soldier had struck him; he drew from his wallet the certificate he had procured with such difficulty and calmly tore it up. He lay down on the bed. Tired, oh how tired! . . . Ran around for that lousy bit of paper. . . . It was foolish. . . . But there's no sense in anything. . . . He lay half the night with his eyes open. The light of dawn appeared. He got up and smoked two cigarettes, greedily inhaling the smoke; in a cupboard, among Antonina Petrovna's old things, he found a length of cord; in a businesslike but mechanical way, no longer feeling anything, nor thinking about anything, he made a noose, shifted the table to the window, got up on it and tested the curtain hook to see whether it held fast. Then, in the same businesslike way, he put the noose round his neck and, mustering his strength, he kicked the table

away. The tinkle of broken glass was heard—that was Valya's photograph which had fallen to the floor. Then came the crash of artillery. But Alexei Nikolayevich no longer heard anything.

* 8 *

When Valya heard the words "Kiev direction" over the radio she became excited; that means that Mama and Papa will soon be liberated! If the Germans haven't killed them, that is. . . . She had tried many times to picture the Germans in Kiev, but could not: the vision that rose before her was either of the prewar city, with people smiling, flower-sellers on the Kreshchatik, and the sky, dense like turquoise, or deserted ruins enveloped in smoke. . . . She read in the newspapers that the Germans drove the inhabitants to Germany. But in Kharkov our forces were welcomed by the inhabitants. . . . So not all were driven to Germany. Perhaps Papa is in hiding? They wouldn't take Mama—she is a sick woman. . . . And so Valya wrote to Seryozha: "If you happen to be in K.. try and find out what has happened to my parents."

Sergei wrote irregularly, but his letters were cheerful and so tender that Valya dared not read them in the presence of other people. It seemed to her that she was picking her way out of a dark, dense forest.

Social life is created even in a long-distance train; the passengers learn to understand each other easily, and the car feels cosy and long inhabited. People had lived as evacuees for two years, and although the life had been hard—overwork and shortage of food—yet it seemed to have become settled and permanent. Only Valya could not accustom herself to this life: there was still something vague in her smile as well as in her fate. People said about her: "a bit strange, but a good worker. . . ." Kozlov, the engineer, set her up as an example to others. A press photographer arrived and took her photograph too. When taking it the photographer said: "Look a little more serious, please, people won't believe that you are a Stakhanovite." . . . Valya laughed and said: "I don't believe it myself." . . .

She had gone to work at the factory in order to break with the past, to be able to think less—the separation was too hard to bear. Now she worked confidently and calmly; standing at her machine she felt nearer to Seryozha. True, he did not handle a gun, he built bridges; but the others did, so machine guns must be precious to him. The war had separated them, it could not be helped; she must devote herself to the war, and then they will meet again. When Valya was engaged at her work the others did not notice the strain she was putting herself to—she seemed to do everything as if she were at a game; but when she came home at night she flung herself on her bed dead tired.

She lived in a tiny room that looked like a cell, and she had put

nothing of her own into it except the portrait of Sergei over her bed. Sometimes she woke up in the middle of the night and gazed long and intently at the photograph—this occurred when she had frightful dreams—she saw Seryozha surrounded by Germans, or drowning in a lake. No matter what she was doing, she thought of him: Seryozha would laugh; Seryozha doesn't like that.... The pain of separation never subsided; when he wrote to her that he had marched over thirty kilometres, she suddenly felt that she would not be able to reach her home from the factory—her knees gave way....

No doubt, had Sergei been at her side, she would have felt the serenity she seemed to have found in that prewar spring, the only spring in her life. Then she thought that she had freed herself of the vain dream of becoming an actress. She had thought the same a year ago when even Orlovsky's praise had failed to stir her. Now, both the communiqués and Sergei's letters presaged an early reunion, she longed for happiness, but she had none; and there awakened in her what she thought had been vanquished, obliterated from her life—a longing for art. She resolutely fought the temptation, but involuntarily lines of poems, monologues of heroes, gestures, repartee, brief, sonorous phrases would force themselves upon her mind....

It was Sunday, a bright warm day—during the Indian summer. Lida and her husband had invited her to go into the country with them, but she had declined the invitation and sat in her tiny room deeply engrossed in thought, and if she were asked what she was thinking about she would not have been able to say—everything had got mixed up: Seryozha, the war, Kiev, the theatre.... She was no longer a girl, it was high time she definitely made up her mind, but she was still unsettled.... Why isn't Seryozha here?...

Later, not thinking about anything, she stood in the middle of the room with a book in her hand.

*Doubt thou the stars are fire;
Doubt that the sun doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar;
But never doubt I love*

*There's a daisy:—I would give you some violets, but
they wither'd all when my father died:—they say he
made a good end,—*

*And will a'not come again?
And will a'not come again?*

*When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook.*

"Have you gone crazy?"

Valya did not see Lida enter the room. On catching sight of her friend she uttered a low shriek and dropped the book. Lida picked it up.

"*'Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.'* . . . Do you intend to go on the stage?"

Valya blushed as if she had been caught doing something reprehensible; barely able to speak, she murmured:

"I happened to find the book, so I read it aloud." . . .

Lida gave her an incredulous smile.

"It was wonderful in the woods. And the mushrooms we gathered—look!"

When Lida went away Valya became lost in thought: Why does this come over me? . . . It was settled long ago—I shall not be an actress. I can understand clinging to a foolish dream before I met Seryozha, I could find no place in life. . . . But it is different now, the war will be over soon and Seryozha will come home. . . . That is something real.

About two weeks before, Valya had received a letter from Nina Georgiyevna. She had returned to Moscow, and urged Valya to return too. Nina Georgiyevna wrote: "Your Institute has come back. I would not drop it for anything if I were you. You are wrong when you write that you have no talent, one professor or another may have been mistaken, I remember, before we left, you read to us some poems by Blok, it was something extraordinary. Valya dear, believe me, the main thing is one's vocation in life—if you feel an urge towards this sort of thing, you must not be daunted by temporary failures. You can live with me until Seryozha comes home, we will be happier together. The news is very good. I am hoping that it will be all over, if not this winter, then next summer." Valya had replied that she had no desire to return to the Cinema Institute; she would remain where she was for the duration of the war, and after that find some other work. The letter she wrote was calm and restrained, but after she posted it she wept half the night.

And now Lida found her reciting "*Hamlet*." . . . What is it that draws me to this like a drunkard to his glass? . . . Seryozha thinks that I have changed, has written several times that he admired my strength of will, for having gone to this remote place and working in a factory. But I am deceiving him, not once have I written him that I am dreaming of the stage. I would like him to see me different—to see me strong. Seryozha would understand. Once he said to me: "I never loved a woman before I met you." And when I asked him: "What did you love?" he answered: "A dream. . . . Not here—in Paris. . . ." Perhaps his dream was a woman, it must have been, but it does not matter, I am not jealous now, I feel that he loves me. . . . But if he, big, strong man that he is, could be infatuated by a dream, why am I so ashamed? . . . It

did not prevent him from doing his work, from building bridges, or from fighting; but it seems to me that if I do not cast away my fantasies I shall lose everything—myself and Seryozha....

The radio spluttered. Six o'clock. Time to go to work soon.... "Our forces conducted heavy fighting for Bobrik Railway Station...." What a fool I am! There's a war on, "heavy fighting," perhaps where Seryozha is, they are firing at him, and yet here am I wallowing in imaginary torment.... Bobrik—why, that is quite close to Kiev. The last time I travelled there I could not tear myself away from the window—Bobrik, then Brovary, and further on forest and sand—Darnitsa. And the bridge—the Dnieper, the monastery, how beautiful!... How swiftly our forces are advancing! Within a few days, perhaps, they will liberate Kiev. Papa is now listening to the sounds of the firing—he must be able to hear it by now. And Mama is waiting and weeping.... And yet my head is filled with nonsense—the theatre, Ophelia, "weedy trophies...."

Kozlov, the engineer, said: "If everybody in the shop worked like Vlachova."... Valya was not listening, she had a vague smile on her lips. Perhaps she was listening, but thinking about something else. On returning home from work she sat down and, overcoming her weariness, wrote to Sergei:

"You don't know how happy I am. Every day you are further and further away, and that means nearer, that the end is coming soon. I am waiting patiently, and if all sorts of silly things enter my head, you will understand when I tell you about them, you will not be angry. You know, when I first met you at the Krylovs', for some reason I thought you were a poet, you looked so absent-minded and inspired—over my head, and my heart went pit-a-pat. Seryozha dear, if only you knew how much I love you, how all my thoughts are always of you, of your labours, your pains, of the fact that you must be dead tired of fighting, and I can see your bridges, and victory, and you, as you were photographed in the country—in a raincoat and a cap, my fate, my love, my all!..."

* 9 *

Richter looked at the glare in the sky and swore. We are beating it again.... Colonel Gabler has sent eleven men to be court-martialed; but it has had no effect—they run as fast as their legs can carry them. We were on the Desna and were told that this was the "Eastern Wall," but when about a hundred Russians crossed to the right bank the whole division fled. To enjoy such triumph, and then to fall so low! Why, only recently we were on the peaks of the Caucasus.... And I am no better than the others; it's enough for me to hear the word "Ivan" to scamper off like a rabbit.

The day before a bonehead who came with the reinforcements had asked: "Where does the 'Eastern Wall' run?" Richter answered: "The 'Wall' is running with us." Everybody laughed. But, to be frank, there is nothing funny about it.

On receiving a letter from his wife, Richter thought to himself: I think I made a mistake in persuading her to go to the Harz. . . . Hilde wrote: "It's all quiet here, there hasn't been a single air raid, but the spirit of the people here is awful, every family is in mourning, there are no men to be seen, and everybody is so selfish, they are displeased that people like me have come here, they complain that they are overcrowded and that prices are rising. They wanted to compel me to go to work, but Robert got me an exemption. There was another terrorist raid on Berlin, worse than the previous ones. Luckily Aunt Margarete went to Potsdam for Klärchen's confirmation; when she came back, she not only couldn't find her house, but couldn't recognize the street she lived in, it was all a mass of ruins. Kurt dear, explain to me what's happening; I can't understand anything now! Italy has betrayed us, and we can't cope with the Russians, there are too many of them. All the time I am thinking how horrible it must be for you in that awful country! There are a lot of Italians here now. I don't quite understand what they are—prisoners of war or allies, but they are at large, and they are working. Johanna says that they are to blame because the House of Savoy and the Communists stabbed us in the back, and they refused to obey the Duce and do not want to atone for their sin. You know that I don't understand anything about politics, but one of the Italians, a very nice man who comes to see Johanna sometimes, says that he despises Badoglio, he was a dramatic critic before the war. When he talks, Johanna and I hold our sides with laughter. This is all the news. I have grown a little thinner, but I am told that it suits me. This place is almost like a village and one does not even feel inclined to dress; I have had a pretty, green, crepe Georgette frock made; when you come home on leave, I'll put it on." . . . It's quite evident that she has hooked on to that macaroni now. Robert was not enough for her. . . . The Italians won't fight, but they wouldn't miss a skirt. . . . The skunk! They are all skunks. . . . The worst of it is there is no chance of getting leave soon—the Russians give us no respite.

The Colonel gave orders to burn all barns, grain and farm stock. One day Richter asked himself: Why do I, a man of culture, an architect, take pleasure in burning down a wretched hovel? The Russians write in their leaflets that this is criminal and inhuman. Nonsense! It's no use playing the lawyer in a war. It is as much within the nature of man to destroy as to build. So much has accumulated in the hearts of every one of us. . . . How many disappointed hopes, lost friends! And besides, the men are taking revenge for the ruins of Hamburg or Cologne. When I look at a burning village I think I can see

Hilde's eyes—bright, sad and shameless. She must be hugging her Italian now....

The day before a Russian woman had wept and prayed that he should spare her wretched hovel. It made Richter angry to think of it—magnificent buildings on Unter den Linden and the house I built for Colonel Gabler are wrecked, and yet this hag wails over her pigsty! He not only set fire to the house, but shot the old woman's cow, killed all her poultry and yelled: "Not a living thing must be left!..." (He did not kill the woman; ginger Karl did that.)

We eat nothing but meat, and it's playing hell with our stomachs, every now and again the men run out of the line. It's a magnificent spectacle, there's no denying it. A good thing it's summer.... I dare not think what's going to happen to us in the winter!

Here there are no more whitewashed huts like those in the Ukraine. Wooden hovels, funny wells with poles; we saw them like this when we advanced during the first summer.... It was grand then! They say the people in this village have connections with the partisans. The Oberleutnant told us not to touch the women; but ginger Karl had to go and kill that old woman and two girls. One of the girls begged: "Please, don't, don't kill us; better send us to Germany."... We are turning the people against us. And what's going to happen later?... They shot all the men. They had a long search for the cattle—the bandits hid them somewhere. Cockroach discovered the herd in a ravine. At first they had a bit of fun—took pot shots at the cows and Richter shot three. Then the Oberleutnant came up and said they've got to hurry, so they wiped the rest out with several spurts from tommy guns.

The Oberleutnant announced that we are to fortify ourselves on the Sozh. Führer's orders. If we allow the Russians to get to the right bank the Colonel will have the whole lot of us court-martialed. God grant that we hold on!...

My feet ache. My belly aches. My heart aches—I have never felt so rotten in my life. All this might have been ours—the cornfields, the herds, the villages. Why are we losing Russia? They say tactical blunders; but everybody commits blunders. As if the Russians have not committed any blunders?... The Oberleutnant says the Italians have let us down. But Captain Hebing says that there are not so many of our troops in Italy. Why are we retreating? We are fed up, that's the reason. We can't go on fighting for over four years. As long as we were advancing there was some sense in it. I may have mentally criticized some of the excesses, but I knew that the Führer was expressing the dynamism of the German spirit. But now, nobody is interested in the war any more. Every day you hear the men say: "When is it going to end?" Without noticing it ourselves, we have become pacifists. If we stick tight on the Sozh, it will only be due to the threat of court-martial—that's no joke....

They spent the night in a village. They could have a good sleep—the Third Battalion was in their rear. The Oberleutnant took up his quarters in the two-storey school building. Richter chose the cleanest of the hovels. Cockroach came with a bottle of Hungarian cognac. They had a drink and a bite. Richter thought about Hilde. The letters were affectionate, too affectionate, perhaps. . . . It was awful not to know what was going to happen tomorrow. How is it all going to end? Worse, perhaps, than in nineteen eighteen, we had civilized foes against us then. You could talk to Lloyd George, but you can't talk to the Bolsheviks—with a fellow like Lukutin—they are stark mad. . . . And besides, we have set their backs up against us. How could I explain to that old hag that her hut was not worth a box of matches? She thought we were depriving her of a palace. Ginger Karl shot her. But she had a husband, or a brother. . . . Supposing those savages burst into Germany? No, that cannot happen—we have the Führer, we have German science, we have the army!

Richter asked Cockroach:

"Do you believe we'll hold on to the Sozh?"

Perhaps Cockroach had had too much cognac, but whatever the reason, he burst out in a peal of senseless laughter; his long, thin moustache twiddled for a long time.

"I have left off believing in anything. I thought I believed in the Lord God, like my old woman. But that's propaganda. And my being a sergeant is also propaganda. Funny! . . ."

And he did, indeed, continue to laugh. But Richter felt terrified: if Cockroach talks like that, it means that it's all up. . . . Richter drank up what was left in the bottle and tried to fall asleep quickly so as not to think of anything more.

They were awakened by the sound of firing. Cockroach pulled his trousers on and snatched up his tommy gun. The night was dark, rain was falling in a drizzle; it was impossible to tell who was firing. Cockroach and Richter ran to the schoolhouse.

"The Third Battalion is in our rear, so it can't be that the Russians have caught up with us," said Richter.

Cockroach did not hear, he ran on ahead. He was an efficient sergeant again.

Somebody shouted: "Why, it's bandits! . . ."

Cockroach in command of the Ninth Company covered the battalion's retreat.

When day broke Sergeant Grün and fourteen men were found to be missing. Ginger Karl had seen a partisan shoot Cockroach.

Richter had regarded Cockroach as an utter fool, but now he grieved over his death as he had not grieved over a single friend. Cockroach—he symbolized our past, that jolly summer, the winter with all its horrors, the inferno at Rzhev, their carousals, girls, fear, nostal-

gia and letters. . . . And he was killed by a bandit who cared nothing for the fact that Cockroach had been in Paris, had fought against Senegalese, and was among the first to enter Byelostok. . . . Poor Cockroach, he seemed to have had a foreboding that he would be killed; he had laughed and said that he did not believe in anything; but he died splendidly, like an old Grenadier. . . .

That village was a hornets' nest, a pity we didn't burn it. But the Third Battalion is behind us—those lads are more thorough than ours, they will leave nothing. . . .

On catching sight of a village standing off the road Richter yelled: "We must burn it! . . ."

He thirsted so much for fire, howls and death that he even forgot about danger.

* 10 *

In moments of affection Richter called his wife "kitten," but when he was angry, or jealous, he thought to himself . . . she's an alley cat! There was, indeed, something feline about Hilde—large, greenish eyes, her lithe movements, and that aloofness that drove Richter out of his mind: he felt that his wife was living her own, separate life, and the more obedient she seemed the more rebellious was she.

In the spring he had been home on leave. He roamed aimlessly through the rooms of his apartment in Berlin, fingered the bric-à-brac and smiled like a child. Suddenly he picked up a small vase and threw it to the floor with an oath. Hilde was terrified. He said: "Do you realize what Rzhev is?" . . . She prepared his bath for him and poured some pine extract into the water. He began telling her an incoherent tale about a pine forest where Scheffer and Walter had been killed. Hilde did not know the men he was talking about, nor did she understand the military terms and the soldiers' oaths he uttered. Wishing to distract Kurt's thoughts from his frightful reminiscences, she twittered to him about her dresses, her petty domestic cares, and about the love affairs of her friends. Richter interrupted her: "That doesn't interest me, do you understand? . . ." He thought that she did not wish to understand how much he had suffered. The heartless doll! While he was wallowing in the muddy trenches she was gadding about with half a score of shirkers! He called her a "slut" and then begged her pardon, stroked her curly head and called her "kitten."

Squeezing her arm until it hurt he demanded: "Who's your lover?" She answered: "You." Kurt now seemed to her to be not her husband, but her lover, an attractive stranger. She forgave him his coarseness, for she felt the breath of war behind it. When Kurt said that he suspected Robert, she laughed: "Good God, he's been in love with me for nine years; he proposed to me before you did! . . . And you think I'd

want him now as a lover? That would be going against nature." . . . She called Robert her "adjutant," and when he brought her some coffee, or a pair of silk stockings, she would say: "You may kiss me on the cheek, as Papa does." . . .

She had remained faithful to her husband, although she could have said with pride that she always had several admirers around her in spite of the total mobilization. She flirted with them—she flirted with everybody, even with cousin Johanna. Recently she had turned thirty and she thought to herself with horror: I'm getting old. But those who said that she was getting better looking were telling the truth. She had preserved the perkiness of an inquisitive girl, but her eyes expressed mature, unappeased passion. "You are a white Negress," Kurt would say to her. "What you need are palm trees and a whip." . . .

Hilde had not wanted to leave Berlin, although she was afraid of the air raids: the apartment in which she had lived with her husband for six years seemed a quiet haven to her. Finding herself in a small town with stupid and spiteful Johanna who regarded lipstick as the symbol of debauchery, she became despondent. Tearful women, gossip, talk about provisions—Frau Müller has received a third parcel from Denmark, Klara has received two "Führer's parcels." Else knows how to make potato salad without oil. . . . Nearly all the men have been drafted, the only young one left is Dr. Lange, but he has an artificial eye, and when he pays you compliments he frightens you. Young women are going about in trousers and talking about how to tend cows and punish Polish servant girls. Everybody was terrified by a Russian who had escaped from the camp into the woods and was said to be attacking wayfarers. They were still more terrified by the prospect of air raids—there was a chemical works in the vicinity of the town.

It was the Italian who provided a little diversion for Hilde. Of course, Luigi came to see her, not Johanna. He made repeated attempts to pass from declarations of ardour to kisses, but Hilde checked him. She liked the way he declaimed like an actor: "O my idol! My star!" She permitted him to kiss her hands, but no more—"Are you crazy? I have a husband! . . ." When the Italian went upstairs to the attic where Hilde lived, Johanna would compress her pale lips and think to herself: the Führer made a mistake in trusting those rascals; he would have done better to have reached an agreement with the English. . . .

Johanna hated not only the Italians, but also the Germans who had remained at home; she even hated Dr. Lange ("he can fight even if he has only one eye"). She detested the women whose husbands were still alive—her husband was killed on the Volkhov in the beginning of nineteen forty-two. Before the war she had continuously quarrelled with her husband—he was a skirt-chaser and a wastrel; but now she had hung portraits of him all over the house and visitors were obliged to stand for several minutes gazing in silence at "poor Karl's" image. She

drove Hilde frantic with her compliments: "You are looking much too well today, cousin," or "You dress so smartly that one forgets about the horrors of war."...

Hilde wrote to her husband that she was frightened by the reports in the newspapers—she thought that was the proper thing to do. Actually, she was confused by the Russian place names; she was not in the least concerned by the fact that the Russians had captured Orel, or Kharkov. Kurt had told her that the Russian towns were large villages, and, moreover, half wrecked. It was merely out of courtesy that she asked her husband what was going on in Russia, and when she received a reply she wept a long time. Of course, Kurt had referred to difficulties before, but every letter had contained a few words of cheer. When he was home on leave he told Hilde that the Russians were fighting desperately, that there were lots of bandits in the forests, that the climate was awful, and that the Russians had a special kind of gun that was enough to "drive you out of your mind." But when Hilde had asked him how it was all going to end, he had answered: "You have only to talk to Colonel Gabler to understand how superior our strategy is to that of the Russians. In the end we shall win, no matter how much it may cost us." But now Kurt was writing: "It is not only that we shall not get out of here; I am beginning to think that these savages will get to you."... Kurt is an optimist, and if he writes like that, things must be in a bad way. On seeing Hilde's tearstained face, Johanna was glad: "Have you received bad news? How is your husband?" "My husband is all right," answered Hilde. "It's Germany that's in a bad way."... She tried to comfort herself: perhaps Kurt's nerves are shaken? During the air raids on Berlin I used to go crazy, but at the front there's bombing all the time, and besides, they have some special kind of gun, no wonder Kurt has lost his head.... Nevertheless, she was alarmed: suddenly she felt that she too had been drawn into this accursed war.

Several days later she received a telegram from her brother stating that he was coming home on a week's leave with a comrade of his. Hilde was always glad to see Arthur, but just now she needed him particularly—what with the weeping Jennies here, and that awful letter....

Arthur looked well, he arrived in a cheerful mood and kept on singing:

*To sorrow, friend, do not give way,
After December cometh May....*

He brought Hilde three kilos of sugar and a large piece of soap. His buddy, Lieutenant Hebing, turned out to be a good-looking boy with a scar on his temple and wearing two crosses. Arthur gabbled without end, while Lieutenant Hebing smiled quietly and stared at Hilde in such a way that she asked him:

"What, are you a hypnotist? People have tried to hypnotize me, but I never yield..."

"Oh no!" exclaimed the Lieutenant. "After Russia, I am simply enjoying the pleasure of being in a cosy German home and seeing a good-looking woman in front of me..."

He behaved courteously, and if Hilde flirted with him, it was not surprising—she could not help flirting. She prepared a delicious supper—ham and green peas, Mosel wine and cognac. Arthur drank a good deal, larked about and showed how the Russians dance—squatting. The Lieutenant did not take his eyes off Hilde. She asked him:

"Where is your unit fighting now?"

"In the south, the Crimea."

"It must be very hot there?"

"I should say so!" exclaimed Arthur with a burst of laughter.

"Kurt is in the centre. He writes that things are going hard there..."

"Better not think about it," said Arthur. "This cognac is wonderful!"

He turned on the gramophone. The Lieutenant caught up Hilde and they danced a long time. Hilde felt giddy—from the wine, from anxiety, from pleasure.

Arthur continued to show off his wit.

"Do you know what the front is like? Like the movies. In front everything flickers; the best seats are at the back..."

Hilde smiled:

"We here are in the very back seats, but still we don't feel safe."

The Lieutenant nodded:

"You are right, Frau Richter, the same fate awaits us all..."

She looked at him, at her brother, at the piece of ugly, brown soap, and tears appeared in her eyes.

"Arthur, I remember, when you came from France, you brought me a bottle of Guerlain scent and you said you would soon land in England..."

"Oh, we will land there yet," Arthur replied.

"Can we go on fighting for so long?"

"Frederick the Great fought for seven years and in the end he won. We have another three years to go."

"The main thing is not to think," said the Lieutenant.

She looked at him in surprise and immediately turned her head away—the Lieutenant's eyes were affectionate and wild.

"I don't know whether you have vanquished any Russian soldiers, but I am sure you have vanquished Russian girls..."

She made beds for her brother and the Lieutenant in the dining room and then went up to her own room. She was smiling, but tears rolled from her eyes. So what Kurt wrote is true... Let the Russians

have Poland or Bohemia, but they must not be allowed to come here. . . . Why don't men understand a simple thing like that? Arthur wants to fight another three years. . . . But there will be nobody left by that time—neither at the front nor here. . . . They've all gone mad! . . . The Lieutenant is a nice boy. . . .

Arthur rested all next day—lollod on the couch reading a detective story. Hilde and the Lieutenant went to the "Marie-Luise" Café—you got a splendid view of the valley from there. The Lieutenant talked to Hilde about the war and she found that he talked more interestingly than Kurt did. He said: "I am sorry for them all, particularly the children. . . . Once I caught a Russian spy, she was a beautiful girl, she bit my finger and then asked for a revolver to shoot herself with. . . . A burning city is a magnificent spectacle, I think that had Beethoven seen anything like it, his Ninth Symphony would have been even more powerful than it is. . . . We are all doomed, but life is doubly beautiful." . . . In the evening they again drank cognac, laughed and danced.

Hilde put out the light, but before she could fall asleep she heard footsteps on the stairs. It's Arthur, she thought. . . . Then she lit the lamp and saw that it was the Lieutenant. She screamed:

"You are mad!"

He put his hand over her mouth and whispered:

"Don't be silly. Arthur's asleep. . . ."

He put out the light and she did not scream any more. When he left, half an hour later, she was lying on her back unable to realize what had happened. She would never forgive herself for this. . . . What insolence—to come uninvited to a married woman! . . . And to his fellow-officer's sister too! . . . They have become savages. Kurt must be like that too. . . . He did not utter a single affectionate word. . . . But still, she felt good, that was the horrible thing about it. . . . A sin? . . . Nonsense, they may come flying over tomorrow and drop bombs, or the Russians may come here. . . . While you are alive you must enjoy life. . . ."

The Lieutenant went up to Hilde every night; she waited for him. When they were alone together in the daytime they talked about trifles. At night they did not talk at all. Then Arthur and the Lieutenant went away. At the railway station Hilde burst into tears and said to her brother:

"Don't let the Russians come here!"

He smiled:

"All right, we won't."

The Lieutenant waved his cap to her.

Johanna said to Hilde: "You do look bad! That's what comes from loving our gallant army. . . ." Hilde guessed that Johanna had heard the Lieutenant going up to her room. Who cares. . . . She answered: "I am thirty, Johanna, and I don't need a governess." . . .

She could not forget the Lieutenant. She now felt sadder than ever. The newspapers continued to write that the Russians had large reserves. For a week there was no letter from Kurt. Hilde was worried and wept. Then came a postcard. Hilde read it absent-mindedly and sent a brief, affectionate letter in reply. Luigi came and told her mournfully that he was being sent to Magdeburg; he had come to say farewell. He kissed her hand. Suddenly, she flung her arms around his neck and said: "My cousin is not at home."...

Smiling, she gazed at herself in the mirror. I am still good-looking. But one must enjoy life. People don't die of old age now... Formerly Hilde had written to her husband irregularly, missed several days at a stretch; but now she wrote every day, and her letters became more and more affectionate—she was waiting for Kurt, would be faithful to him unto death....

One cold, moonlit night the windows rattled and then a siren whined. Hilde lay in her night dress on the earthen floor of a bomb shelter. She was shivering from cold and fear. It was worse here than in Berlin... She uttered a vow: Lord, if I get out of here alive, I shall never be unfaithful to Kurt again! Never, not with anybody!...

Next morning she saw wrecked houses. Johanna said that over a hundred had been killed. Hilde wrote to Kurt: "Don't be anxious about me, all's well here. I am waiting, waiting, waiting for you."...

Several more days passed. She felt a pain in the chest—she had probably caught cold in the bomb shelter. She called Dr. Lange. He sounded her, prescribed a mixture, and then said: "In spite of everything, you are prettier than ever." She tried not to look at him, his left eye was as cold and expressionless as fate... Closing her eyes she whispered: "You are crazy!... How silly you are, doctor! We are all silly..."

* 11 *

"I've had the rings replaced. Comrade Major, but the new ones are loose too..."

Sergei swore—Those damned rings again! We managed to reach the Dnieper, but we can't get a set of piston rings put right. Every minute is precious now. Everybody is hurrying—one more square on the map—and then the Dnieper... The trucks sink into the white sand; in the glare of the headlights it looks like snow. Loza says warningly: turn off the headlights—we shall be at the river soon!

Sounds rang hollow in the sands. Everybody spoke in a half-whisper. Nobody smoked. The sappers hauled logs. Signalsmen passed with drums of wire and green field-telephone boxes. Field artillery. Tanks were taking cover in a wood. General Petryakov arrived...

An old man related that the local fishermen had sunk eight boats

in a shallow spot to hide them from the Germans. The boats were pulled out. Gates of houses were hauled up. Rafts were made. Ground sheets were filled with reeds and straw. . . .

Sergei was in the forest. Here it was like a regular sawmill. The pontoons would not be brought up before tomorrow: the roads were heavily jammed.

One could hardly drag one's feet along. Boots full of sand. Hearts are at once heavy and glad. Everybody is filled with impatience, as if across the river was the end of the war, home, a girl at the wicket-gate, profound happiness. But across the river there were Germans. They were firing at random—our men were protected by the woods. One shell dropped among a group of men who were resting. They had reached the Dnieper, but did not see it. . . .

Here's the river! The men sluiced their faces, scooped up water in their hands and drank it—it's the Dnieper! They had said good-bye to it in nineteen forty-one—some at Kiev, others at Moghilev, others again at Smolensk. They had dreamed of it, they had not dared think of it; they had sung: "O Dnieper, Dnieper, far away you flow, your water is like tears," had sung it not because they wanted to sing, but because they wanted to weep, or to swear. It was a river like many others, but came the great grief, and the Dnieper cut across the destiny of everyone, whether from the Volga or from Siberia. They had left the Dnieper cursing themselves, but returned to it different men, and not all returned; the men's footsteps were heavier—the memory of those who were lost was like lead; they had come from the Don, from the Volga; and those who had come from Stalingrad could be easily recognized by their eyes, by their smile, by the low and muffled voice in which they said: "We have got here."

Why are all the towns on the other side? The Germans are lucky. But nothing can save them now. Can anything like this be stopped? . . . There are more than several divisions here—the entire country has reached the Dnieper—with its sorrow, resentment, hunger, refugees' bundles, wrecked lives and burnt cities. A single thought fills everybody's mind: faster! We want to live! My wife writes, my mother. . . . Before reaching the Dnieper one could refrain from thinking, one could submit to the measured rhythm of attacks, counter-attacks, marches, one could drive off temptation. Here everybody feels: we are finishing the game. we are smashing through.

But pain and death claim their own. Even on this fine white sand there is blood. Stretcher-bearers carry away two tommy gunners; one is moaning, the other is smiling; perhaps it is not a smile, but the convulsions of death.

The days are bright and warm. But the nights are cold. The water is icy. How far is it to the other bank? Sergei says: "Four hundred and eighty." The wind rose. A heavy swell.

"Do you call this a boat?" grumbled Sergeant Sadofyev softly. "Where's the bucket?..."

He muffled the oars with rags: there were Germans on the other side....

The Germans knew that the Russians had no pontoons—the air reconnaissance had reassured General Siebert. Nevertheless, he ordered fire to be opened on the river by way of precaution.

"The bitch! She's just sucking up the water!" whispered Sadofyev.

Two other boats were swept far down the river. The Germans were banging away. The water seethed. In the boat there were two men and a machine gun. They rowed for three hours, their palms bled. They pulled in near some bushes. There were Germans somewhere nearby.

But the sky was all in stars—the Ukraine was true to herself: she must have stars on a night like this.

And then? ... A machine gun rattled. Other boats came up. Rafts made of poles and fuel barrels were floated.

Then the pontoons were brought up. Shchedrenko swam across the river, pulling a rope across. A mortar shell struck the pontoon bridge. The sappers caulked the holes with their tunics. Rabinovich dived to the bottom of the river to salvage the machine gun. The Germans attacked the jetty.

Sadofyev could now blow off steam and swear to his heart's content. The Major said it was four hundred metres, but when you swim it, it's all of four kilometres.... What was Staritsyn thinking about? We'd have looked fine if all the boats had scattered! And the Fritzes came on at once.

And then? ... Then they congratulated Sadofyev. Sergei dictated a report to Headquarters. At the telegraph centre, Shura Baranova ticked off a long telegram. The correspondent of the *Krasnaya Zvezda* ran around enquiring: What does he look like, this Sadofyev? If he could only send a brief description of him.... A communiqué is being drawn up in Moscow. The whole world will know about Sergeant Sadofyev tomorrow.

For a moment Stalin tore himself away from the map. He sees a vast front, the line of the Dnieper, columns on the roads and the disposition of the enemy's forces, and amidst all this—there is a young sergeant with sad and yet roguish eyes. Sadofyev.... I think there was a Sadofyev with me in Tsaritsyn. Perhaps he is the father of this one?... And Stalin rows across the Dnieper with Sadofyev, just as he had sat on the mound at Stalingrad with Osip and Minayev, just as he had marched amidst the blizzard from the Don to the Dnieper. Good lad, Sadofyev! With him we'll cross the Vistula and the Oder!...

Colonel Gabler chewed the stump of his extinguished cigar. He was annoyed with the Russians. Fancy crossing a river like this without pontoons! They are savages, and that's where they have the advan-

tage. . . . The Colonel had a map before him, he was contemplating a counter-attack; the Russians must be hurled back; he must gain at least two weeks. And suddenly, amidst the numbers of divisions and the names of villages, islands and shallows a lad appears, with high cheekbones and wearing a forage cap. Sadofyev climbs on to the plinth and throws down the green-bronze eagle.

In Paris, Lejean was sitting at his radio receiver. He was in a very gloomy mood—only recently he was told of the death of Paul, he had heard no news from Josette for over a month, two days ago André and Garrot were arrested, and he had to send a group to Rouen, but he had no arms to supply them with. Signals—"This is Moscow calling." And then it seemed to him that the Dnieper was close by—near the Seine, comrades and friends were hurrying, those with whom he had bound his fate, among them Sadofyev. He looked like Milet, only his hair was lighter. . . .

General Petryakov said to Sadofyev: "You are a hero! There's no denying it—a hero! . . ." Sadofyev related in a matter-of-fact way: "As soon as I jumped out of the boat I went to work with my trench tool." . . . What was there exceptional about that?—he thought to himself. True, it was a rotten boat, but he got across. The main thing was that he dug in in time. . . .

Krylov smiled. Here is the first harvest. I wonder where that American with the fountain pen is? He didn't believe. . . . Look at the crop, we've raised! I suppose he now thinks we have no pontoons. But sometimes the job must be done on logs. They can't understand that; all they have been doing for two years is prepare. It looks as if we'll get to Berlin before they are ready. . . . I knew a Sadofyev, but he was no longer young, quartermaster, third rank; when we fought our way out of Rossosh he killed two Germans. He was no fool, either. . . . There's lots of Sadofyevs, nothing surprising about that. But there's lots of heroes—now that is surprising! . . .

And every Sadofyev answers with delight: "He may be a relative, I don't know." . . .

In Kostroma, between the textile mill and the old monastery, a quiet, ailing woman was putting her children to bed and thinking of her first-born: Sasha has become famous. . . . I only hope he comes home alive! . . .

A small, shallow trench in the white sand—it all started with that. They succeeded in getting the regimental artillery across. The Germans were firing from a steep hill. But our men held on. Sergei recalled Stalingrad: there we said "we are holding on"; you can't say that here. Here we say "we are holding it."

The Germans brought up their aircraft, they chased every tiny boat, they soon got the range of the crossing. On the third day they sank a heavy pontoon bridge. The pontoons that were still fit for use had to

be salvaged. The men took gasmasks and attached long tubes to them. Osipenko and Zaichik got into the water. They worked on the river-bed for three hours, unhitched the pontoons and raised the sound ones. When Osipenko heard that the General had recommended him for the Order of Lenin, he sighed and said: "If my wife had known, perhaps she would not have left me. . . ."

Later General Petryakov said:

"It's a big army, so we need a big bridge."

"I have everything prepared," answered Sergei. "A wooden one on piles up to the island, and from there a floating one. . . ."

He threw his head back and smiled vaguely.

At Stalingrad Sergei had fought with sullen intensity; there was no time for fantasies there, sometimes there was no time even to think—it was sheer stubborn fighting. But now his eyes shone with the light that Nina Georgiyevna had known when he was a child, when she thought that Seryozhenka would be a poet.

They drove in piles, standing in the icy water. The Germans peppered them with artillery shells and bombs. They worked at night, but German rockets lit up the Dnieper. Every now and again stretcher-bearers carried away the wounded. The current swept away the piles. A sapper stood on the bed of the river holding a pile while another drove it in from above. The men did not sleep for three days and nights. Sergei did not leave the scene of operation even for a moment. Sergeant Shirokov stayed in the water for fourteen hours at a stretch. Sergei asked him: "Well? . . ." Shirokov answered: "It's done."

Later, when the bridge was finished and hundreds of trucks were crossing it, when Sergei again talked and laughed, Major Shileiko asked him:

"How much timber do you need to enable it to stand? . . ."

"The textbooks say: one cubic metre for every three hundred kilograms of traffic load."

Sergei recalled how Sergeant Shirokov, shivering with cold, had answered: "It's done."

"It's easy to calculate the timber: the human material presents a more difficult problem. . . ."

"Whom do you mean in particular?" enquired Shileiko.

"I mean everybody. I say it's difficult to calculate how much a man can stand. . . ."

A big battle was raging on the right bank; it was said that there had not been one like it since the battle of Orel. General Petryakov succeeded in advancing twelve kilometres; but the Germans drew up large forces. The General said: "They are throwing in their strategical reserves, I'm certain." . . .

The men swore: "The Fritzes are at their last gasp, fighting like mad." . . . The situation was grave—there was no going back. The Army Commander promised to send up a fresh division. And then the disaster

happened—the Germans sent their aircraft against the bridge—two direct hits. Every hour was important. . . .

Seeing that Rashevsky had lost his head, Sergei jumped into the water and showed the men what to do. At that moment about a dozen German dive bombers attacked the sappers. Rashevsky was at Sergei's side. At Stalingrad, Rashevsky had said: "If you're killed at night, it's sheer accident." . . . He died in Sergei's arms. The bridge was repaired. The reinforcements came up in time.

Rashevsky was gone. Gone were those with whom he had been during the frightful summer of nineteen forty-two. Zonin was killed in Stalingrad. . . . He had talked about the theatre and about Marusya, and then lay on a table, small, like a child. Voronov had dreamed of building a bridge across the Don when our forces turned back. Well, here was the Dnieper, but Voronov was not here. It seemed to Sergei that he had never had another friend like him. He had told Voronov everything—it had been a bitter summer. . . . He had told him about Paris. About Valya. . . . It had been easy to talk to him; he would smile slightly and nod his enormous head. . . . None of the old ones were here. . . . How had Sergei managed to survive? . . . He smiled distrustfully at the autumn, gorgeous and exhilarating.

A week later Sergei went to the C.P. General Petryakov had his quarters in a neat, white hut. The mistress of the house was standing with her chin propped up by her fist sighing for her Gritsko and admiring the General's epaulettes. The General was in a good humour.

"Nothing has come of their efforts. Barsukov has just let me know; they are clearing out of Kiev—trucks four abreast. . . ."

Then the General began to scold Sergei:

"Why are you taking risks? You must not do that. . . . This is not nineteen forty-one. . . . You are tired—that's why. . . ."

"Everybody's tired. . . ."

"I don't mean everybody, I mean you. . . . It's always like that—a man gets tired and the brakes refuse to work. Suddenly, nothing frightens him. . . ."

Sergei shook his head:

"I am frightened now. I was not frightened at Stalingrad. I didn't seem to care there. But now, when we are near the end, I am very reluctant to die. . . ."

Before him sat a grey-haired man wearing eyeglasses, good-naturedly puffing at a cigarette. But Sergei saw Valya, the spring in Moscow, the lights on the bridge. And suddenly, quite beside the point, he said:

"The frailest thing in the world is a bridge. . . ."

He was thinking at that moment not of the bridge he had built across the Dnieper, not of the Krymsky Bridge on which he had stood with Valya on the eve of his departure, not of the old bridges across the Seine, he was thinking of something else—of life.

The house stood on the steep slope of a hill, far from the village, surrounded by oaks and alders. Widow Lagrange was sewing at the window, her daughter Marie was blowing up the fire. Dusk set in. Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. Widow Lagrange looked out to see who it was—it was a German. She was afraid to open the door, but if she did not open it, he would break it down, or shoot. What has he come for? Has he got on the tracks of Miki, or Dédé?... Widow Lagrange asked:

“What do you want?”

“Bread.”

Obviously, he was a Gestapo man. When they took Mortier, they said they wanted a drink of water.... The police van must be lower down the road.

When Widow Lagrange opened the door, she was dumbfounded: he was all in rags! Perhaps he was a deserter? ... She gave him some bread. He ate it greedily. He must be a deserter. ... Her fears vanished; she even felt sorry for this tall, cadaverous man who smiled like a child.

“Wait, Marie will warm up a plate of soup in a minute. It’s cold today....”

The German thanked her. Widow Lagrange reflected: so even among them there are some decent ones.... I wonder why he ran away? Tired of fighting, I suppose? Or perhaps he was rude to his superior? If he deserted, he must be one of the decent ones.... But Marie did not even glance at the newcomer; last June the Germans shot her fiance. How long has he been wandering in the forest?—Widow Lagrange asked herself. It’s not his own greatcoat he’s wearing—he is a giant, and the coat barely reaches his knees. At last she screwed up her courage to ask:

“Have you lost your way?”

He nodded.

“Do you want to get to Saint-Jean, or are you coming from there?”

With difficulty he composed a sentence of German and French words:

“I have run away from the mines; going into the mountains.”

“But where to?”

“Where there are no Germans.”

Perhaps he has killed a fellow German? A good thing if he has.... Only, what was he doing in the mines. There are Gestapo men there.... Widow Lagrange was torn with curiosity, but she did not know how to ask the German whether he was a decent man or a rascal. She gave him a plate of soup. But the German said nothing.... It was dark and cold outside. Where will he go at night? But she could not allow a Boche to stay in her house! Perhaps he was one of the Gestapo guards? ... As if guessing her thoughts, he said:

“Madame, I am not a German.”

This made Widow Lagrange angry: she had allowed him to come in and had given him food, and now he was poking fun at her!

"Perhaps you will tell me that you are a Frenchman?..."

He laughed, and she again said to herself: how nicely he smiles!

"Madame, I escaped. I am a Russian."

All this time Marie had been listening to the conversation with her back turned towards them. But now she exclaimed:

"I guessed at once that he was a Russian prisoner of war!"

He was sitting at a round table. Marie brought a map on which the fighting line was marked with red pencil.

"The Russians have crossed the Dnieper..."

He closed his eyes, but there was a happy smile on his face. Then he pointed to the Don:

"This is where I was captured. I was wounded—in the chest..."

After a pause he said softly:

"I am looking for partisans..."

Widow Lagrange and Marie glanced at each other, but did not answer. They made up a bed for the Russian. He gave a frightened glance at the pillow and the white sheet and fell asleep at once—he had been wandering in the forest for two days and nights.

"I'll go and see Miki in the morning and ask him what to do with him," said Marie to her mother.

The Russian slept. He dreamed of a wide, pale river. Suddenly he saw a bridge blow up, and blue-black smoke. ... Then it was very quiet; he was sitting at a round table in a lustrine coat, and at the table was an old Frenchwoman, she had Mishka on her knees. ... Why doesn't he recognize me? ... Mishka! ...

"He is talking in his sleep," said Widow Lagrange.

Marie pricked up her ears.

"'Mishka'—What does that mean? ... Do you know, Mama, that's exactly how I pictured the Russians. He has a kind face; but I can understand why it's so terrible for the Germans in Russia—a fellow like that could strangle a body..."

Marie left the house at the break of day; she went out quietly so as not to waken the visitor. The shutters were tightly closed, and the Russian woke only when a young man, somewhat unusually dressed, entered the room—he wore flannel trousers, a German officer's tunic, and a French military cap. It was Miki. He enquired:

"Who are you?"

"A Russian."

"What Russian?"

"A prisoner of war. Nikolai Voronov. Senior Lieutenant in the Engineers."

He wanted to relate how he had got to France, but he could not find the words.

but that dream had already become vague, inaccessible to the mind. He distinctly remembered that summer's day in the plain, and gloomy Shulyapov. After that another day burst upon his memory—the day of his escape. The guard was a red-haired, freckle-faced German. Voronov hit him on the head with a lump of rock.... The forest, and Widow Lagrange's cottage....

He was restored to life. He enquired: "How's it going over there?..." He had not seen a newspaper or heard the radio for many months. Only now did he learn that the blockade of Leningrad had been pierced, but that the city was still under the fire of German guns. Is Nina alive?... We have captured Smolensk, fighting is proceeding for Kiev. At times he was overcome by longing: he was so far away, cut off from everything! He would sit and brood then. Dédé came along: "The Russians have captured another city, only I have forgotten its name"... And although Voronov was yearning to know what city that was, when he looked at Dédé's beaming face, he smiled: I am not alone—these people are with us, and that means that I too am fighting for Kiev, like Sergei, like Zonin, like all the men in the battalion....

In this partisan unit there were local men and men from other districts, factory workers, miners, vinegrowers, shepherds, a schoolteacher, a veterinary surgeon, two Spaniards, a Czech, and several girls. It was commanded by Dédé, a village schoolteacher; he had fought in Spain. All of them listened with bated breath to every word that Voronov uttered: he came from that other world of which they dreamed during the dark, partisan nights. "The Bear said"—those words sounded like a verdict, against which there was no appeal.

The Czech was called by that name: Czech. He was an elderly man, a watchmaker, deliberate in his habits, accustomed to the enigmatic but precise motion of the tiniest cogs, but who, in a rage, had cut a sergeant's throat. When he saw Voronov for the first time he was so agitated that he could not utter a word.

"Do you understand Russian?" Voronov asked him.

And then Czech began to talk, and talked without stopping; this was the first time for six years that he spoke in his native language. Voronov guessed rather than understood what he said. He kept on answering: "Yes.... Of course."

The Frenchmen were amazed at this scene. Dédé asked:

"You also understand Russian, Czech?"

"All Slavs understand Russian," answered Czech.

He wanted to say that it was not a matter of grammar, but he only smiled and wiped his kindly, near-sighted eyes with his handkerchief.

Jose, the mason from Barcelona, said to Voronov:

"I met a Russian on the Ebro, his name was Ivanovich. Is he in command of a regiment now, or of a whole division?"

"I don't know this Ivanovich."

Jose looked so sad that Voronov had to smile:

"I remember him now. He commands a division."

"I thought so. Do you know what, Bear? When I was told that the fascists had attacked Russia I was both sorry and glad. I know what suffering war brings. My daughter was killed by a bomb in Barcelona. But I was glad because I had seen that Russian on the Ebro, and I knew at once that this meant that it was all up with the fascists..."

Miki asked Voronov to teach him Russian in his spare time. Miki had been a welder at the Renault plant and called himself "an old Young Communist Leaguer." He tried to memorize the Russian declensions.

"Why 'stola' and not 'stol'?* It's a crazy language!... But I'll master it all the same! When the war's over, and I'm still alive, I'll go to Russia, if only for a week... What do you say: 'za stolom'?** No, I'll never master that... But what would I give for just a peep at Moscow!..."

Old Désiré was a vinegrower; he recognized two things in life: the Communist Party and good wine. Before the war he used to vote for the Radicals; but when the Germans came the Radical mayor of his town hung up a portrait of Pétain and treated the German lieutenant to old wine. This made old Désiré swear. Later, the Communists shot two Germans and a traitor. Old Désiré loved good wine as a poet loves verse; he could distinguish all shades of wine, and could tell unerringly where a wine came from—Michaud's plot near the cemetery, or Bellay's father's plot next to the flour mill. When his two passions came into conflict, he did not hesitate long, he went to join the partisans. He said: "Nineteen forty-two was a frightful year—the Germans killed Michaud and Joseph, but it was a splendid vintage year..." He joined the unit a month before the grape harvest. He would sigh and say: "This is a good vintage year too. I don't know what's happened to my vineyard; I suppose the Boches have trampled it all down." One day old Désiré asked Voronov:

"Tell me, is the wine near Moscow better than ours?"

"There's good wine in the Caucasus, but there are no vineyards near Moscow. The climate is too severe..."

Old Désiré's eyes expressed perplexity: he could not imagine how one could enjoy life without good wine. A moment later he patted Bear on the back and said:

"Never mind, Bear, when this damned war is over and you carry out another five-year plan or two, you will have vineyards near Moscow, and your wine will be better than ours..."

* "Stola"—the genitive of "stol" ("table").—*Tr.*

** At the table.—*Tr.*

Voronov realized what faith these people had in his country. He was filled with pride and perturbation: they regard me as a representative of the Soviet Union, but I am an ordinary, average man; I can make a slip, commit a blunder. . . .

But he made no slips—neither in blowing up the bridge, nor in attacking the German train. He and Dédé carefully worked out everything. Thirty partisans, armed with German tommy guns, lay in the gully alongside the railway embankment. Voronov placed the mine. He left fifteen partisans, led by Dédé, on a wooded hill to cover the retreat in the event of failure. The Germans were asleep when the explosion occurred; many of them at first did not realize what had happened. Voronov ran to the embankment from which the Germans were running and never let go of his tommy gun. This was the first big operation the unit had undertaken. They picked up about a hundred tommy guns and a considerable quantity of ammunition and captured a German lieutenant who was so frightened out of his wits that he kept on stammering: "Please, Herren terrorists, don't kill me, I'm the most peaceful man in the world." . . . The partisans lost two men—Robert and old Désiré. Robert died at once, but Désiré was carried into the forest. Jeannette dressed his wound. He was in great pain. When Voronov went to him he tried to smile. He said:

"It's all up with me. . . ."

"No. you'll pull through. I did. . . ."

"I will not pull through, Bear. But that's nothing. I've had my day. There's one thing I'll ask you to do—you will no doubt see Stalin when the war's over. Tell him that old Désiré threw up his vineyard, fought and then died, and that he sends Stalin his greetings. Tell him that: old Désiré sends his greetings. . . ."

On the night that Désiré died eighteen peasants from neighbouring villages came and said: "We can't wait any longer." . . . Came the long, autumn rains. The forest smelt of death. Voronov sat at the radio receiver trying to get Moscow. And Miki was singing in an undertone:

*Freedom comes not as a gift,
For freedom you must fight.
Whistle quickly, comrade,
It's time for us to fight.
And early will we die,
Long before the dawn,
But that's why we are partisans,
The first ones in the line.
Sorrow will not age us,
For love we'll not repine.
Whistle quickly, comrade,
It's time for us to fight. . . .*

When the stout man sitting in the corner of the railway car got up, took his coat off and wiped his forehead, Mado caught fright; is it hot in here? She herself could not get warm, she was shivering—she had caught cold that night walking from Saint-Remi in the pouring rain. It will be awful if I break down! . . . The most important thing to her was to reach the partisan unit and report that the question of machine guns had been put before the B.O.A.

She wandered from towns to mountains and from mountains to towns. She told the landlord of a small hotel that she had come to visit a sick aunt, enquired of peasant women where she could procure a sack of potatoes, talked to a lawyer about a fictitious legacy. Later, she climbed steep, narrow roads—in the wintry cold, in the heat of August, in the rain, she reached a lonely farm or a shepherd's hut and, after drying her clothes, or drinking a glass of water, went on further. These talks with strangers—with comrades, with enemies, with such as were indifferent, the feverish bustle of railway stations, mountain tracks, addresses, plans drawn on scraps of tissue paper, affected merriment or a carefully acquired businesslike air, and the sense of constant danger seemed natural to her, as if there was nothing else, nor could there be anything else in life. She rarely thought of the past, never thought about the future, and was surprised when any of the comrades happened to say: "Now, after the victory." . . . Her days were taken up with petty worries—how to deceive a policeman, how to get through the next guard post. And when she was alone—waiting for a messenger on the road, or standing at the dust-coated window in the corridor of a railway car—she thought of the people with whom this work had brought her together. They led the same life that she did—transporting arms, blowing up trains, hiding in the underground, roaming in the rare and much too sparse forests, printing leaflets, setting fire to warehouses, creeping forward with a revolver or hand grenade. Nearly every day she learned of the death of somebody she had seen a week or six months before; some were killed while fighting, others were arrested by the Gestapo, or by the gendarmes. Mado knew what the men were doing, but she did not know how they had lived before, what they had longed for, whom they had loved. She remembered faces, words, and those petty things that only a woman can retain in her memory—a handkerchief, a slip of the tongue, a photograph on the wall. With the aid of these petty things she tried to picture to herself the life of the person concerned. She was sustained by the feeling of association with and affection for others. She was never alone—she travelled, she walked with people who crossed her life, casually, as it were, only for a moment, but the memory of whom remained deeply imprinted in her heart.

Just now she was thinking of Maurice. She had seen him only twice. People said of him that he was a "desperate fellow," but to Mado he had seemed a dreamer. They were discussing an operation; he was gazing at the window that was lit by the glare of the setting sun. Suddenly he said: "It's like a house on fire." . . . Mado noticed that the button on his shirt collar was missing; he caught her glance and for some reason said apologetically: "I didn't have a needle." . . . Lucie told her that before the war Maurice had studied the history of art. He was nearly fifty. How could he stand this life? . . .

Mado glanced at the man sitting in the corner, opposite to the stout one. He was sleeping with his mouth slightly open. He resembles Luc. . . . Where is Luc now? Josette said that she had had no news of him since the beginning of September. Josette can hardly keep on her feet—she has changed beyond recognition since the death of Paul. . . . The main thing is to keep going, not to stop for a moment. . . . When I was walking last night I felt all right; but no sooner do I sit down quietly than all sorts of things enter my head. . . . How my head aches! . . .

In the corridor somebody sang: "Don't sing, everything is clear without song. . . ." That night, near Sacré-Coeur. Sergei was telling me about his mother. I realized then that he would go away and would not take me with him. . . . Why do I feel so cold? I think I am going to be ill. That will be very awkward just now. The train gets in at Limoges at eleven fifteen. Another three hours. . . . When we get there I must get to Lucie's house. I remember the address. But suppose Lucie is not there? Nonsense, it was arranged that I would spend the night at her place and that I would see Maurice in the Place Jourdin tomorrow morning. Why do they arrange meetings in public squares? That is unwise, particularly in the morning; in the evening we could be taken for a loving couple. . . . But how cold I feel!

Mado raised her coat collar. She noticed that her neighbour was watching her. He was a tall man, about forty years of age, with a small moustache and a languid look in his eyes. A familiar face. . . . Where have I seen him before? No, it's simply that he resembles a movie actor; they all look like that when the picture has an unhappy ending. . . . But why is he staring at me. Perhaps he can see that I am shivering? He will think I am nervous. . . . She quickly thought of a story: I am going to my cousin, she lives in rue Racine, she owns a milliner's shop. Perhaps he is a detective? He doesn't look like one. But there are all sorts of detectives. . . . I can't go to another car. If he is a skunk, he may call the police—may think I have killed someone. . . . Shall I say that I have the grippe? I am afraid I will not be able to talk, I am really ill, my thoughts are getting muddled. . . . Perhaps he has taken a fancy to me and wants to have a traveling companion. We live in the underground and we think all the world has its eyes on us. . . . But they don't care.

they earn money, make love, fall sick with grippe—a warm bed, tea with rum, quiet. . . . My head is bursting. . . . I'll try to fall asleep. . . .

Mado closed her eyes tightly and dozed. She is under arrest, being interrogated and giving confused answers. She woke up because she did not recognize her cousin, and the German laughed and said: "What a silly story you have invented." . . . She now felt very hot; large beads of perspiration appeared on her temples and at the corners of her mouth.

"Are you feeling unwell?"—Her neighbour had a kind voice.

She nodded.

"I have some aspirin. I'll bring a glass of water in a minute. . . ."

After she had taken the aspirin he enquired:

"Are you going to Paris?"

"No, to Limoges."

"That's where I am going. We shall arrive late, the train is an hour overdue. Will anybody meet you at the station?"

"No. I want to give my cousin a surprise."

"If you permit me, I will help you to get to your cousin's place. . . ."

"Thank you, but I will manage alone, I have only a small kitbag—I shall stay there a week. . . ."

She answered with courtesy and restraint, but it seemed to her that she was confused, was betraying herself. The aspirin made her sleepy. Dozing off, she felt that her neighbour was not taking his eyes off her. Evidently he has taken a great fancy to me—she comforted herself with that because she could not think any more. She fell asleep, and slept so soundly that her neighbour roused her with difficulty.

"We shall be at Limoges in ten minutes."

She hastily drew a mirror from the handbag, smoothed her hair and refreshed her face. For a moment she thought she had recovered, but when she tried to get up her knees gave way. When she alighted from the car she began to shiver again. Cold rain was falling. I must get to Lucie's. . . . She ran down the long rue Theodore Bac. When she reached the Place Sadi Carnot she glanced round and saw her fellow traveler. It was quite clear now that he was a detective. . . . Instead of turning down rue Grange-Garrot she ran to the left. She was afraid to look round. It seemed to her that somebody was overtaking her. Feverishly she thought: what shall I do? She must not go to Lucie's, perhaps that man is shadowing her. . . . She halted. There was nobody in sight. . . . But he could have hidden somewhere. . . . Rain, you can't see anything. . . . She passed several more streets. An old man in a cap was walking behind her. He has probably passed me on to somebody else. . . . I'll not be able to hold out in the street until the morning. . . . The best thing will be to go to a hotel. If I am being shadowed, they will take only me. My head feels empty. I can't think—who am I, where have I come from? . . .

A sleepy attendant opened the door. While she was filling up the visitor's form he scratched his cheek and mumbled something. I think he suspects. . . . I have been doing this for over a year, but I have never felt like this before. . . . It's all because I've got a temperature. . . .

The attendant conducted her to a small, filthy room. A tall bed with a quilt. The wallpaper was bespattered with squashed bedbugs and dried soap lather. Mado undressed quickly and went to bed. The sheets felt icy. She could not get warm under the quilt. The next room was occupied by a couple; a female voice kept repeating rapturously: "You rascal," and a male voice growled hoarsely: "Come on, chick." They won't let me sleep. . . . If I could only get some sleep, at least for an hour—before they come. . . . She jumped up and shook everything out of her handbag—papers, lipstick, money and compact; she knew she had nothing else in it, but still, she made sure. The bell rang downstairs; footsteps on the stairs. They must be coming for me. . . . No, a door creaked. . . . It is now two o'clock; they like to come at four. . . . It must be very hot here. I'm all wet. My head. . . . I feel as though somebody is beating the back of it with a hammer. . . . She threw off the quilt. And suddenly she felt better. She lay on her back, not daring to move. Somebody put an ice bag on her head. That's Mama. . . .

Do you understand now, Sergei? . . . I am simply a foolish girl. but I am not a rotter. Wait! Why don't you let me talk? . . . Perhaps it's because of that that I love you—you never let me talk, your mind is taken up with your own thoughts and you see nothing, nothing. . . . There! You have thrown your head back and have screwed up your eyes. Darling! To the devil he'll send me? He sent me long ago. . . . But we have met after all. . . .

It was eight o'clock when Mado awoke. She felt better, her head no longer throbbed, she merely felt a dull, continuous pain, and her thoughts were no longer muddled. She felt weak. . . . I must have had a very high temperature last night. I took that man for a detective, but he was simply going home—there's only the one street that leads from the station to the centre. . . . He walked quickly to get out of the rain. . . .

Mado dressed unhurriedly—Maurice would come at ten. She wandered about the deserted streets for an hour to see whether anybody was following her. No, she had imagined it all. The bad thing about it is that I can hardly keep on my feet and Maurice will certainly say that I must return to the unit tomorrow. . . .

Mado halted in front of a florist's shop. The door was open. The fat, dark-lipped flower woman was eating soup and warming her fingers against the clay bowl. In a metal pitcher were some faded, dark violet and rust-coloured asters. The slate on which the names of the saints are written to remind one whose name-day it was and to whom to send bouquets, bore the inscription: "All the departed." This was All Souls'

Day; the flowers were intended for the cemetery.... A man in a black coat came in; he fingered the flowers and said:

"They are not fresh-cut...."

"You have to take what you can get, nowadays, Monsieur, and not what you want...."

• Somebody said:

"It doesn't make much difference to the dead...."

Mado looked round, but there was nobody there.

Ten o'clock. She walked round the whole square. Dripping benches, small puddles in the reddish sand. A lady with a white spitz. An old woman, an urchin, but no Maurice. A quarter past ten. Lucie said that he is very punctual. Twenty-five minutes.... I'll wait until half past, if he doesn't come, I'll go to Lucie's at six, she is home by six....

Mado walked to the exit and suddenly caught sight of the comrade who had been with Lucie when they were distributing the newspapers. His name was Jacquot. Lucie said that he had only recently joined the group—at the end of August. For some reason Mado had taken a dislike to him, but afterwards she scolded herself: I am behaving like Father, judging people by appearances.... She walked past Jacquot: she was to have met Maurice, perhaps Jacquot was here by chance, and it was against the rules to greet comrades in the street. But Jacquot strode towards Mado:

"Hallo, France!"

"Hallo, Jacquot. Have you any business with me?..."

"I have come instead of Maurice."

"Where is Maurice?"

Without answering Jacquot stepped aside, and before Mado could grasp what was happening some policemen grabbed her and bundled her into a prison van.

She was led into a bright office room. On the writing desk stood a pair of China shepherdesses and the photograph of a young woman in an antique bronze frame. Major Krausgrell was polite, and he had a friendly face that inspired confidence. He made Mado sit in a comfortable armchair, enquired whether she smoked, and patiently, with a barely perceptible smile, listened to her long story—where she came from and why she had come here. When Mado finished he said: "All right, we'll verify all you have said and you will be able to stroll round the town before the evening."... There was one thing that bothered Mado: she had given her name as Antoinette Larue, but the Major persisted in addressing her as "Madame France." Was Jacquot a traitor?... She could not sit and meditate, she smiled in a resentful and yet confiding way.

"Still, I don't understand why I have been arrested, Monsieur Major."

"I don't understand it myself. But I am ready to bless the stupidity of my subordinates; thanks to them, I have the good fortune to converse with a charming woman...."

Suddenly a shriek was heard in the next room, so awful that Mado jumped. The Major smiled.

"It's always like that.... They won't let you work in peace...." *

He slowly opened the large folding doors. Maurice was lying on a marble table; a German soldier was beating him on the stomach with a riding whip. Maurice was shouting:

"Oh-o!... Jacquot, the skunk!... And you are a skunk!... Oh!..."

The Major said:

"Now then, Alfred, stop it.... You are preventing me from speaking to this lady."

Mado could not tear her eyes away from Maurice. His face was bleeding. He was lying like a corpse.... The Major closed the doors.

"Forgive me, this is not a spectacle for a young woman's nerves. I confess, ours is not a pleasant job...."

Mado knew now: this was the end! Jacquot had betrayed them all.... She mustered all her strength and said:

"Why are you detaining me? I am wasting time...."

"Yes, that's always annoying. Tell me, Madame France, what is your occupation? I mean your peacetime occupation...."

"I paint designs for the Limoges porcelain factory...."

"How charming! Flowers, I suppose?... I bought my wife a dinner service with Alpine violets. Perhaps it is your design?... We have done no harm to Jacquot, he will be free within two or three days, only a few formalities to go through...."

"Will you release me?"

"I don't know. I can release you.... I can.... How shall I put it to you?... It's all very unpleasant, the more so that you are such a charming creature; one wants to fondle, not torture you. This is the program I propose to you. First treat me as your confessor—a list of the terrorists, their addresses, what you have been doing, and other trifles. Then we'll go to bed. I'll put a lace coverlet over you and give you indulgence for all your sins. After that—freedom and Alpine violets.... I tell you, it's much more pleasant than the next room, although Alfred calls it the 'pastry shop'."

He stepped up to Mado and affectionately patted her cheek, but at once snatched his hand away:

"Viper!... Alfred, teach her a lesson!"

On catching sight of the German lieutenant Jose clutched at his Tommy gun. Everybody laughed:

"Can't you see it's Miki?"

Czech's disguise was still more striking—a grey gabardine overcoat, a felt hat and an enormous pigskin brief case. Four partisans were dressed in the uniforms of German privates. Czech spoke German perfectly; Miki and the disguised partisans were to accompany him. Dédé and the machine gunners were to take up posts at the gates; if the guards managed to call Germans from the town they were to open fire. Voronov, Charlot and Jose were to try to remove the sentry from the watch tower.

When all had assembled, Dédé said:

"It's a hundred and twenty kilometres to the prison. It must all be over by three in the morning. If we are late, they will be shot; the execution is to take place tomorrow..."

It was a desperate ride—on a dark, rainy night, along a winding road. The drivers hurried—they will be shot tomorrow! They evaded guard posts and travelled over cart tracks. All peered intently into the darkness that was lined with fine streaks of rain...

Czech knocked at the gates.

"Open!"

"Who's there?"

"The Gestapo. We've come for the convicted prisoners..."

The guards were French. Two Gestapo men were there to see that everything was in order; at present they were sleeping peacefully on an oilcloth-covered couch in the Chief's office. The guard refused to open the gates; his orders were to allow nobody to enter. Czech shouted:

"Idiots! I'll have you all packed off to Germany!..."

The guard looked through the peephole once again: yes, it was the Gestapo... That fellow with the brief case has been here before. The devil take him! One gives orders, another countermands them, and we have to answer for it! That fellow will get mad and have us sent on hard labour in two ticks... Czech banged at the gates and swore. The guard heaved a sigh and opened the side door.

Roused by the noise, the two Gestapo men came rushing into the courtyard. One of them yelled:

"Fire!"

A machine gun rattled; the two Germans dropped to the ground almost simultaneously. Voronov succeeded in laying out the sentry on the watch tower. The courtyard was now covered by his machine gun. A warden who took it into his head to resist, shared the fate of the Gestapo men.

"Open the cells!" ordered Miki.

The condemned prisoners were convinced that these were Germans who had come to take them to be shot. Nobody would believe Miki when he shouted: "We are maquis. . . ."

"Comrades, let us die like men! . . ."

They sang the "Marseillaise." Then Miki called them a "collection of idiots," "sausages," "geese" and many other more striking names; the more fiercely he swore the merrier the condemned prisoners became: only our people can swear like that. . . . Suddenly one of the condemned men rushed towards Miki:

"René! . . ."

Miki embraced him and then said:

"In the first place, I'm not René, but Miki; secondly, speeches and bouquets are put off until this evening. Look alive now. The trucks are outside, and mind, the seats are not reserved."

One of the solitary confinement cells could not be opened. The warder swore that the key was broken.

"What's a key?" retorted Miki. "I'll break your head, that will be worse. . . ."

The warder grunted and opened the door. Maurice was lying on the floor, unable to move. They carried him out.

In the guardroom Mado saw Jacquot.

"What have you been doing here?"

He answered without looking at Mado:

"I was to be released in the morning. The Germans told me to wait here."

Mado looked for Dédé; she had met him when he belonged to the "Gabriel Péri" unit.

"Dédé, there is a traitor here. he betrayed Maurice."

Dédé answered:

"We'll take the traitor along too."

They released twenty-seven prisoners, nearly all of whom were to have been shot next morning. Charlot found his brother. Miki could not calm down: "Just think of it—suddenly I see Pierre, and we worked in the same shop." . . .

The trucks rushed up the mountains. Day broke. Forest all around. bare and dripping. Dédé stopped his truck. He said to Jacquot:

"It's a pity to waste a bullet on a traitor, but we are not rotters, we are partisans. Take this cigarette. You may smoke. That's all."

He shot Jacquot. They proceeded on their way. Here are the maquis! . . .

The truck on which Jose, Charlot and the Bear were riding had not turned up. Miki was responsible for the loading. Dédé shouted:

"How did you manage to leave them behind?"

"The Bear said: 'Go on, we'll catch you up.' . . . And you know yourself. if the Bear says anything. . . ."

"Who is this Bear?" enquired Mado.

"Didn't you see him? The tall one. . . . He is a Russian officer, not a White, a real one, from over there. He escaped from the mines. . . ."

Everybody talked about the Bear, except Dédé; he was sitting and brooding: what's happened to the Bear? . . .

While Miki was going from cell to cell, one of the warders told Charlot about the behaviour of the prison officials: "The worst of the lot is the S.S. man. . . . He lives in a cottage that was assigned to him, about half a kilometre from here. He comes here every evening to interrogate the prisoners. The other Germans call him 'craftsman number one.' He hangs the prisoners head downwards. . . ." Voronov suggested: "Suppose we go and visit this craftsman? . . ." Charlot and Jose agreed.

Everything passed off smoothly. The S.S. man didn't even have time to grab his revolver. Voronov collected the files from the cupboard and took them away. It was still dark when they left. They encountered a number of gendarmes. The driver stepped on the gas and the little Citroën darted off, doubling in its tracks like a hare. They got away. . . .

The girls did their best and prepared an excellent dinner: it so happened that on the day before Yves, whom they called "chief quartermaster," managed to procure four sheep and a keg of wine. They drank and sang, and hugged each other with delight. Pierre, Miki's old friend, said for the hundredth time:

"Isn't it a joke? . . . We were sure we were going to be shot in the morning. . . . But here we are sitting with the boys, drinking wine! . . ."

Maurice was lying in a shack. He enquired: "Where's Jacquot?" "He's finished," answered Dédé. Maurice said: "That's good. I was tormented by the thought that he would get away." . . .

At last Mado saw the Bear. A giant, but he has the eyes of a child. . . . She said confidently:

"I once had a Russian friend. Long ago. In my other life. . . ."

She tried to recall all the Russian words she had known. Suddenly, she smiled sadly and said:

"K chortu poshlyot. . . ."

Voronov burst out laughing:

"Why on earth did you learn that?"

"That's how they tell fortunes in your country."

"Well, they told your fortune badly. . . ." He put his arm round her in a friendly manner and said: "To his heart he will press me. . . . That's the Russian way. . . . It's a big holiday for us tomorrow—the anniversary of the Revolution. . . ."

Dédé stood up:

"Let's drink to the Russians. Only you didn't say it right, Bear, it is our holiday too. . . ."

Voronov thought of the big battle that was raging: we shall take Kiev soon. It's a hard job—the wide river, steep bank. . . . They are

probably making an outflanking movement.... But we'll take it, that's certain.... He recalled another summer—the steppe, the smell of wormwood, the Don.... He was walking with Sergei. Both were silent—too bitter for words.... Everything has changed there now. Where is Sergei? On the Dnieper, perhaps?...

Mado had not yet recovered from the effects of what she had gone through. Her back and legs ached—after she hit the German she was cruelly beaten with a riding whip. She had already prepared for death. Yesterday her mind was taken up with only one thought—the Sampaix unit was undoubtedly waiting.... Death seemed to her to be merely relief from torture; beyond that she did not peer. she did not recall anything. And suddenly, Dédé came into the cell....

The smell of decaying leaves, the smoke of the campfire. Miki was singing:

*We fain would stay with thee,
But such is fate's decree
That we unto our death must go
Before the first cock's crow....*

Mado gazed at Voronov affectionately:

They call that Russian. Bear. He comes from over there.... No, Sergei will not press me to his heart, and I don't want him to, all that belongs to the past.... There are tears in my eyes, that's nothing—they are from the smoke. How funnily those fir cones are burning!... So I am going to live?... And life again embraced her—sweet, restless, enigmatic life, like the flames of the campfire.

* 15 *

Lejean was sitting in lawyer Garcy's spacious office, waiting for a man named Châtelet, Funny! The representatives of the B.O.A. have fallen in love with the Metro, every delegate of theirs is named after a station. But why is Châtelet late? The place I have to stay at tonight is at the other end of the town, and I can't go by Metro—too many raids....

The walls of the office were hung with photographs of the master of the house in a black gown—arm raised and fist clenched threateningly, large, conspicuous tears and a smug smile. In nineteen forty-one Garcy said that "Pétain is Jeanne d'Arc," but now the wind was blowing the other way, and so he struck up an acquaintance with the A.S.; when the Germans are expelled it will transpire that it was none other than Garcy who had expelled them. Lejean yawned. One reaches an age when the human comedy begins to get boring.... No sign of Châtelet yet....

At last he arrived. He was a tall, lean, soldierly-looking man with keen, penetrating eyes. Lejean realized at once that this was no pawn.

Châtelet began to talk about the bombing of French cities; the German radio was trying to set the people against the Allies.

"It is our task to explain to the people that these misfortunes bring nearer the hour of liberation."

"Undoubtedly," answered Lejean. "But the question of arms arises. I do not take it upon myself to judge the airmen. I am speaking from our French point of view. Of course, the railway bridge must be destroyed. They have bombed it seven times. The town has been almost wiped out, but the bridge is intact. . . . During the past six months we have blown up twenty-eight bridges. We could have done much more, the only obstacle is the shortage of arms. . . ."

"Transportation is difficult, but I hope it will be better now. . . ."

"All right, let's leave the question of transportation. But why don't they let us have the arms that are already here? Why are they kept like collections of rare objects?"

"They are being kept for G-day."

"Which will be. . . ?"

"When it will be. That's not for us to decide. . . ."

"In June nineteen forty-two I was told that there was no need to attack Germans as there would be a landing within several weeks. This summer, after General Schaumburg was killed, a colleague of yours said: 'Why dissipate forces? They are going to land in August. . . .' It is now November. . . . They say: in the winter the fog prevents a landing, in the spring and autumn the Channel is stormy, and in the summer the weather is too clear. My only hope is that when the Russians reach the German frontier, these gentlemen will stop studying the barometer. . . ."

Châtelet smiled:

"The Russians are fighting well, there's no denying it. I am a soldier, Monsieur Luc, and I can appreciate the Red Army's strategy. But we must reckon not with the Russian temperament, but with the plans of America and Great Britain. I am told that there is considerable disagreement in London, that General Arnold, for example, is of the opinion that the bombing of German cities is enough. There are some who advocate a southern variant. Italy is absorbing considerable forces. . . ."

"And so, we've got to sit and wait for fine weather?"

"Nobody says that we've got to wait. . . ."

"How do you interpret 'attentism'?"

"That term was invented by your friends."

"Perhaps the term is ours, but the substance is yours. . . . What I want to say is: B.O.A. is dooming the Forces de l'Intérieurs to inaction."

"The B.O.A. is dropping arms to the best of its ability."

"And the arms are being buried in the ground. . . ."

"They are being concealed from the Germans. I don't understand what annoys you, Monsieur Luc..."

Lejean got up, paced up and down the long office, and then, looking Châtelet straight in the face, he said:

"You may talk like that after the victory ... in the Chamber, or at the peace conference, but just now it is preposterous... Anyone of us may find himself in the Gestapo tonight... Why play the hypocrite?"

Châtelet answered calmly: he betrayed his agitation only by the deliberate way in which he extinguished the stump of his cigarette.

"Very well, I'll talk to you not as a representative of the B.O.A. but as an ordinary Frenchman. I am a Catholic—you are a Communist. We are now in Garcy's office. We may be arrested any moment. The same Gestapo men will torture us, and we'll both be shot on the same waste plot. You are absolutely right: we are united by the Germans."

"I am afraid that is the only thing that unites us ... and then, not completely.... Many of your friends have learned nothing. They are afraid to supply us with arms."

"That's true, too. It was different a year ago, when everybody admired the heroism of the Communists. I then thought that a miracle had happened, and that the nation had found unity. But miracles don't happen.... The situation has improved. The Germans are meeting with defeat in the East. In spite of your scepticism, the Allies will land sooner or later. Italy is at her last gasp. The spirit in Germany is at low ebb. And so, the first fissures have appeared. Does it surprise you? It does not surprise me in the least.... Take world affairs—you see the same thing there. As long as the fight was raging on the Volga, rivalry was out of the question, everybody applauded the Bolsheviks: but now the Anglo-Saxons are worrying about the division of the skin, although the bear is by no means dead yet. Was it not Terence who said: 'I am human, and I am subject to human weaknesses'?'..."

Only now did Lejean realize how tired he was. Why was he talking to this man? Every word he uttered breathed hatred.... Lejean said abruptly:

"That's enough of philosophy! Are we going to get any arms?"

"How do you want me to answer you—as the representative of the B.O.A., or as an ordinary Frenchman?"

Lejean was unable to repress a smile.

"First as the delegate of the B.O.A."

"To the best of our ability. Probably when the new supply bases have been organized. In December. or in January...."

"And as a Frenchman?"

"No."

As Lejean was leaving, lawyer Garcy came hurrying into the ante-room, and grasping Lejean's hand in both his own he repeated several

times with a tremor in his voice: "Heroes! Our heroes!..." Lejean smiled ironically: another photograph for the wall....

He walked across the town with a heavy heart. Of course, he had known in advance that he would get nothing, he had gone to the interview only because his comrades had insisted; but his conversation with Châtelet had left a bitter aftertaste—involuntarily he looked into the future. Naïve people think that when the war is over there will be no fascists and we shall have paradise on earth.... But ahead of us lies a struggle, fierce and stern, more arduous than the present one, perhaps.... Will yesterday's Cagouards make peace with us?... Today they need us: our people know how to die, this is still appreciated in nineteen forty-three.... But how will they talk to us in nineteen forty-eight? The Moor has done his work.... But the Moor will not go! How bitter that is! One would like at least to dream of happiness....

He spent the night with strangers on the outskirts of the town. After letting him in, the mistress of the house went to visit a neighbour. Lejean glanced at the clock—it was eight. Marie was to come at nine. He could rest for an hour.... He sat down on the rickety bed. It was cold in the empty room, so he kept his coat on. Sadness, profound and heavy, overcame him. His personal grief struggled with thoughts of the future. Four years ago he was happy. It was in the spring, he remembered it well, he had just come home from work. Mimi was playing pranks and she emptied his fountain pen on the carpet. Paul was swotting for his examinations; he said "Trigonometry is the hardest."... Josette played Chopin's nocturne.... All this is gone.... Where is Josette now? In a cold, strange room like this, perhaps, waiting for the Gestapo men to come for her. Perhaps she is with the maquis?... Or dead?... There have been no letters for a long time, communication is bad.... Paul is dead.... Mimi is dead.... The war may end, but they will not return.... Josette and I—two trees with the boughs lopped off.... Such trees do not become green....

There was a knock at the door. It was Marie. She brought her son with her, little Jeannot.

"It's better when I take him, less chance of the police bothering me. And besides, I have no one to leave him with. You haven't seen him before, Luc, he's like Pepe, isn't he?"

Lejean smiled—it seemed funny to him that this little fellow could resemble Pepe. Gazing at the child he thought—yes, there is something of Milet about him, the eyes, his movements as he reaches for his mother and waves his arms, his smile....

"So restless," said Marie. "A real son of Pepe."

"How old is he? Two?"

"Oh no! A year and two months."

Lejean recalled Milet. Again sadness drew him down as into a maelstrom. Milet, shock-haired, delighted with everything, enthusiastic,

he had Marie then and was only just beginning to enjoy life. They killed him. As they killed Paul. . . .

Marie said:

"Henri suggests that they take twenty tommy guns with them to Vincennes. They need six men. With experience. . . ."

"When?"

"On the ninth."

"All right, I'll pick them tomorrow. The barracks?"

"No. The Soldiers' Home."

"I'll go too. . . ."

Marie has a child, but she works, carries leaflets and arms. . . . Runs the risk of being shot. Or of being sent to Ravensbruck, which is worse. . . . And even if she lives through that. . . . He recalled Châtelet's cruel eyes. . . . Again war. . . . Of happiness, ordinary happiness, there will be none. . . .

"Jeannot will have a better time than we have had, won't he, Luc?"

He hastened to answer:

"Of course!"

Then he reflected. Will he? . . . All the books that he believed were unanimous: mankind progresses, painfully, but surely; sometimes the road is winding, sometimes it is like a spiral; the fainthearted see no sense nor object in this constant gyration; nevertheless, mankind does move. True, a Gestapo man is worse than a savage—evil also becomes more perfect. The despairing will say: there have been righteous men before. Yes, that's true. But before they acted by instinct. Now the mind operates. Herein lies the pledge of happiness! The mind will triumph. Henri Lejean will not have what people call a personal life, but that is not important. Life is broader. . . . Often you hear people say "another's happiness." But is not the happiness of Milet's son, or of the Russians, my happiness? . . . So it's true. All we have to do is to vanquish grief. I am tired. . . . But things will be fine, if not in ten years, then in a hundred years' time. . . .

He took Jeannot in his arms and sang a ditty Mimi had loved when she was small:

Our billygoat is so clever.

It grows cabbages, did you ever. . . .

Lejean no longer thought about the future. He was now unconscious of loneliness and anxiety, of that war which is longer than war, of the coldness of the stranger's room, of the melancholy that overcomes an ageing man. Life had come to him—small, boisterous and restless. And stern Luc, about whom Châtelet related that he had "seen a real fanatic," Luc, who had only recently participated in an attack upon a train and who in three days' time was to hurl a grenade at a sentry, now smiled affectionately at Jeannot. And Jeannot clapped his hands.

Léo remembered a sunny, February day. The flower vendors were selling mimosa. He bought a sprig for Léontine. He was in a light-hearted mood and could not cast it off. Every day he told his wife that salvation would come any day now. Only the day before Léontine had begged of him: "Go into hiding, they are rounding up all the Jews." . . . He had replied: "They will not dare to after Stalingrad." . . . He walked home carrying the sprig of mimosa, feeling happy, his mood reacting to the sounds of the street that presaged the coming of spring. He found Léontine waiting for him at the street corner. She said: "They came for you. . . . A good thing you were not at home!"

He sent his wife to the Saugers': they said they could shelter Léontine; they would have sheltered Monsieur Alpert too, but that was too risky, they had their children to think of. . . . Léo went to Lancier. He had not visited Corbeille since the catastrophe, as he did not want to compromise Maurice. But he had no alternative now, and Lancier had said that if ever his friend were in trouble he would do all he could for him. Lancier was so scared when he set eyes on Léo that he was positively dumbstruck. Oh, horror! People may have noticed that a Jew was visiting him. . . . "Good afternoon, Maurice," said Léo, failing to see Lancier's embarrassment. "How are you? I hear you have married." Unable to restrain himself, Lancier shouted: "What do you want?" Léo looked at him and laughed: "What do I want? Spiritual sustenance. Your opinion of André Gide's diaries, the recipe for poularde à la Périgord. Good-bye, Maurice. Don't be angry with me for troubling you, I have become terribly absent-minded—I came to the wrong door." Lancier hastened after him and in the hall whispered: "If you need any money, I can give you a little." . . . Léo walked out without uttering a word. Lancier did not tell his wife about this visit of Léo's—Marthe was so impressionable, it would upset her. . . . When she asked him who it was he answered: "Oh, somebody who had mistaken the number of the house." . . .

For three weeks Léo lived in Sembat's studio. It was hot. Léo lay half-undressed on a couch—Sembat forbade him to go out. Léo was whistling a song; Sembat was working on a still life and saying: "Taken on the whole, people are trash. I believed in art, but works of art are made by people and for people, so art is trash too. Nivelle writes poetry, and connoisseurs like it, but he is working for the Germans at the Prefecture, verifying lists of suspects. I did not live at the time when Persephone was invented, but I am afraid that even at that time there was a Gestapo, that some received honours and others were drawn and quartered. How uninteresting." . . . Later the concierge was told that a parachutist was hiding in Sembat's studio and Léo was obliged to leave.

He searched for people in the underground and came across a journalist named Buisson who told him that he could get him to London via Spain; all that was needed was money. . . . Léontine had managed to take some things from the apartment. Every day Buisson came and asked for another thousand—"the papers cost a lot of money." . . . When everything had been sold, Buisson told Léo to go to hell.

For two months Léo lived with a peasant near Melun and worked on his farm. One day the peasant said: "I have shown I am a good Frenchman, and now you must go! The gendarmes are nosing around. Yesterday one of them asked me whether it was true that I am hoarding wheat." . . .

Dr. Morillot arranged to have Léo put up with one of his patients, a man named Levasseur. Léo slept in the servant's attic on the seventh floor. This saved him. The police came to arrest Levasseur; it appeared that he belonged to some underground organization (Morillot did not know this). The concierge said nothing about the servant's room. On hearing how Léo escaped arrest, Morillot said: "I have never seen a luckier man in my life." . . .

Léo retained his cheerfulness. He comforted Sembat, assured him that art was not trash, nor were people brutes. On one of his gloomiest days, when he was roaming around shelterless like a hunted animal, he said, smiling, to Dr. Morillot: "I don't want to die until I see our friend Nivelles hanging outside the Academy of Fine Arts." He was able to make even the stingy and crusty farmer laugh. On rare occasions he met Léontine and talked to her about love, tenderly, with inspiration, without bitterness and without strain, and listening to him, she, for a moment, forgot about horrible reality.

He often pondered over his past life; it seemed to him to have been insignificant and at the same time beautiful. He said to himself: I thank God also for its insignificance! He did not renounce the past, but he wanted to finish up this kaleidoscopic, absurd and yet charming life in a worthy way. He searched eagerly for the people who were fighting the Germans. This man who loved company did not want even to die alone. But not one of his acquaintances was connected with the Resistance organization. Bitterly he reflected: I associated with the wrong people. . . . Recalling his visit to Kiev, he felt envious of his brother: Olya did not live for a villa in Bidart, or for suppers at Corbeille; he is no doubt fighting now. . . . On the whole, the Russians have proved to be right. There is justice in this. . . . I led too easy a life. . . . Profound sadness lay at the bottom of his heart like ooze, and he was not always aware of it.

Autumn came. An old woman gave him shelter in a dark, stuffy lumber room. One evening, unable to stand the confinement any longer he went out, although he knew that this was an unwise thing to do—there were big raids in the city. He eagerly inhaled the fresh air. Dusk had already fallen and the world seemed to be tinted a greyish-violet

hue. He thought of Léontine and grieved that he had never seen his son. He was named Robert. . . . A hand was placed on Léo's shoulder; absorbed in his reflections, he thought it was the hand of a friend. "Are you a Jew?" a policeman asked him. Léo lost his temper: "I am a Frenchman, Monsieur, but you are a German *vache*." . . . He was cruelly beaten up and then taken to Drancy, the mustering centre for Jews who were deported to Poland.

Even in Drancy Léo remained cheerful. There was weeping all around him: there were many women with children. Léo comforted them:

"It will be better in Poland than here. The Russians will get there before the Allies get here. . . ."

He resolved to make an attempt to escape as soon as he arrived in Poland. He could speak Russian, he could make himself understood to the Poles and get to the front line. He would say to the Russians: "I fought in France, and fought well; it was not my fault that the war there was a phoney one." . . . He would be taken into the Red Army. Who knows, perhaps, he would see Osysa and Mama again. . . .

Two thousand were awaiting deportation to Poland. Some were torn by anxiety because it was said that people were forced to work so hard in the camps that it was impossible to stand it long. Somebody said that they were to be sent to Lublin, or Auschwitz, there people were killed—but even the pessimists thought this improbable: why waste fuel and transport facilities? . . . Many, like Léo, were cheerful and said: "If they intended to kill us, everything would look different." . . . The food they received in Drancy was bearable; doctors carefully examined everybody; at five o'clock the children were given bread and jam; even theatrical performances were arranged. An old, bearded Jew, originally from Cracow, said:

"Do you know why they are coddling us in this way? They want to bury us with music. I know them—they are mad butchers. . . ."

Léo laughed:

"It's not that. They've simply got their tails between their legs now. You ask why they are giving the children jam. The answer is very simple—because the Red Army has crossed the Dnieper. I am not sure who will get to Poland first—we or the Russians."

They were hurriedly bundled into a train and by mistake Léo was pushed into a car for people with families. Nobody was allowed to leave the train. The cars were overcrowded. In the corner of each car there was a urine bucket. Children wailed. An old man died on the journey. The only thought the people comforted themselves with was: we shall arrive soon.

"I was told that we will be sent to a button factory," said a young, good-looking woman who had a three-year-old daughter with her. "Well, I'll make buttons, as long as they leave me my Lulu. . . ."

But Léo dreamed of escape. If he failed to reach the front, he would look for partisans in the forests. The partisans would accept him—he was a good shot. There were big forests in Poland. . . . He recalled his return journey from Kiev through Poland. Everybody was guessing then whether there would be war or not. . . . But now they were suffering, wondering when the war would end. Why was so much sorrow inflicted upon the people? He could not understand. They could be singing, smiling, making sewing machines, going to the movies. . . . Father was killed in the first war; he ran forward singing—and a bullet struck him in the chest. . . . Perhaps Osa has been killed too. . . . Isn't it outrageous?—People live, build houses, give birth to children, and every twenty-five years they begin to destroy the houses and kill the people! It was the Greeks who invented this game, I think—Sisyphus rolled a boulder up the hill and then it rolled down again. . . . Couldn't life be arranged in some other way? Osa said that it could. . . . Perhaps the Russians are right, I don't know. It would be better if life were harder, but decent. France is my motherland; I came there when I was a boy, grew accustomed to her and loved her. If I were told to choose between Paradise and France, I would choose France. But I am convinced that the Russians have no Pétain, and can't have. For a Pétain to exist, there must be a lot of people like Maurice. Is Maurice a bad man? No. I do not condemn him. He is neither bad nor good. He does not live, he plays at living. I think I played too. . . . But perhaps I didn't. . . . It was real life with Léontine. . . . I fought honestly. And I wanted to go on fighting, but I could not find the proper people. . . . I will find them there. . . .

Night. The train was standing at a station. Léo pressed his mouth to a chink in the side of the car in the endeavour to inhale a little of the cold, fresh air. German soldiers were standing outside the car talking to each other. Léo understood German. He listened intently in the hope that the Germans would say where they were being taken to. But the Germans were merely discussing their private affairs.

"Günther was called to the recruiting office yesterday. He's got a rupture, but that doesn't count now. Did you go to see Mariechen?"

"Yes, she received two letters and a parcel from her husband."

"Where is her husband?"

"In Italy."

"That's not so bad. I wish they'd send me to Italy. At least it is warm there. It must be awful in Russia. Have you read that we have abandoned Kiev? . . ."

Léo didn't listen any more. He smiled rapturously and whispered to everyone: "The Russians have captured Kiev. . . ." Utterly worn out, the people received the news with apathy: what was Kiev to them—they were being taken to penal servitude. . . .

"I was born there," Léo told the young woman who had said that she was going to work at a button factory. "It is a wonderful city,

nothing like other cities. It's a dream, on my word of honour! You walk along and gasp for breath, not only because the streets are steep, but because it is so beautiful. . . . But that's not what I wanted to say. . . . The chief thing is that the Russians are thrashing those Aryans. . . . You have a lovely little daughter. I look at her and think to myself: she has a good life before her. Don't cry. I am firmly convinced now that the Russians will liberate us. I had a little son. I never saw him. I was in the army, and he was killed during an air raid when my wife was leaving Paris. . . . We have been through a great deal, that's true, but I think the worst is over now. . . ."

"Why do you think the worst is over?" asked the young woman, dabbing her eyes with a tiny, moist handkerchief.

Léo shrugged his shoulders.

"It's obvious. I tell you the Russians have captured Kiev. Within a month or two they will be in Poland. . . ."

Another day and night, and another day. They arrived in Auschwitz in the evening. The Germans yelled: "Climb out!"

Soldiers. An officer with a riding whip. Men in striped clothes, like convicts in an American film. Mud, thick, greasy mud. It was cold. An old woman had not managed to put her shoes on; she was dragged out of the car barefooted. She pleaded:

"Please, Monsieur Officer, let me put my shoes on. it is very cold. . . ."

"You will soon be warm, Madame," answered the officer.

The young woman pressed her little girl to her breast and hastened to tidy herself up; she took a mirror, compact and lipstick from her handbag. Everybody felt relieved: they had arrived! But why is that officer carrying a riding whip? And these men, dressed like convicts? . . .

"Line up!"

Léo found himself next to one of the convicts. The latter said to him in Polish:

"Give me some cigarettes."

Léo gave him a cigarette and asked him:

"Where are we?"

"This is Auschwitz, that is, Oswięcim. . . . Give me all your cigarettes, you won't need them, all the same you are going to be killed. . . ."

Léo did not understand: the convict spoke Polish too fast for him.

The officer looked each one over and said "to the right" or "to the left." The young and sturdy were sent to the left. The rest were lined up on the right—the sick, the aged and the children. Léo surmised: evidently they are sorting us out right here for the kind of work we can do—heavy or light. When his turn came, the officer hesitated. Léo had aged considerably lately. Before the war he had looked like a rosy-cheeked, chubby-faced boy; now his face was wrinkled and his eyes were dim.

"How old are you?" the officer enquired.

"Forty-three."

The officer laughed:

"You can't fool me. To the right!"

Léo found himself among the aged and the feeble. He thought to himself: I suppose my job will be to sweep the barrack floor. . . . But I'll escape, all the same. . . .

How good it was in the fresh air! Cold, but that had its charm: in the autumn particularly one wants to live, do something, fight. . . . The wind dispersed the clouds and the moon appeared, large and orange-coloured, like a pumpkin. On a cold, windy night like this I'll escape. . . .

The old people wailed, moaned and prayed. Their grief infected Léo in spite of himself, and to keep his spirits up, he sang his favourite song:

*When spring returns,
Fortune will smile. . . .*

"Where are you taking us to?" he asked one of the Germans.

"To the bathhouse. Dirty pigs like you must first have a good wash."

And the soldier laughed.

They were ordered to undress; then, naked as they were, they were driven out of the barrack. The people were now shrieking, all had a foreboding of evil. Léo no longer sang. Sadness gripped his heart as in a vice. Suddenly he realized: they are going to kill us now. He rushed at a German and punched him in the head with his fist. Another German dashed up and hustled Léo into the building they had called the "bath-house." The iron-bound door was slammed behind him.

A motor whined. Dark waves of gas, like storm clouds, came floating from the ceiling. The people inside the building rushed about, shouting frantically. Léo knew that he was dying. Fragments of his life flashed before his eyes: He was with Léontine, and was saying: "My dear, we are in Paradise." . . . Violet wistarias were blooming on the dead grey wall. A profound, inexpressible calm prevailed, the heat of the summer's day was subsiding, the droning of a humblebee was just barely heard. Léontine laid her head on Léo's shoulder, her wavy hair stirred slightly. She said: "Léo, call Rob. . . . Are you crazy? What do you mean, you don't see him? He is three years old. . . . He is throwing an orange-coloured ball." . . . The ball was over their heads. No, it is the moon. . . . And Mama is whispering: "You have grown, Léo. I did not recognize you." . . .

The rolling clouds of gas came down lower. The people fell writhing to the floor. Léo felt excruciating pain, as if a hook had been thrust into his body and his flesh was being torn. . . . He fell face downwards and for a long time moved his arms as if he were swimming. A German

put his eye to the spyhole and turned a handle; the bodies of the dead and the half-dead slipped down below.

Heisling, the clerk, was sitting in the office; his pallid face looked like a clay mask. He wiped his pen with a piece of rag and opened a large book that differed in no way from all the account books in the world. In this book he carefully made the following entry:

Arrived from Drancy 11/XI	1,018	
Liquidated		972
Left		46

Displeased, he thought to himself: why are the "lefts" in tens? It puts the figures out. In all the previous cases they were in hundreds. He went over the figures again:

Arrived from Westerborg 21/X	1,388	
Liquidated		1,041
Left		347
Arrived from Vienna 22/X	772	
Liquidated		447
Left		325
Arrived from Terezin 23/X	3,862	
Liquidated		3,700
Left		162
Arrived from Posen 28/X	406	
Liquidated		212
Left		194
Arrived from Lemberg 30/X	819	
Liquidated		687
Left		132

The page was full. Heisling picked up a ruler, carefully drew a line under the last items and totted up the figures. At the bottom of the page he wrote:

<i>Total</i>		
Arrived	8,265	
Liquidated		7,059
Left		1,206

After that Heisling took a copy of the *Berliner Illustrierte* from the desk drawer and gazed long at the photographs of the cinema actresses. Things are fine in Berlin—girls, and in general, there's something doing; but I have to be here in this stinking hole of an Auschwitz! . . .

The moon went down. A red glare lit up the sky. The bodies of the people brought from Drancy were being incinerated in enormous

furnaces. This went on until the morning. A dense cloud of black smoke hovered over Oświęcim. The smoke penetrated the barracks, the throat, the ears, the blood; it settled in a shroud of dust upon the earth, upon the buildings, and upon the sickly-greenish face of the clerk Heisling.

* 17 *

Minayev had never seen Osip in such a merry mood. They were celebrating the anniversary of the October Revolution and the capture of Kiev. A noisy company had collected in the hut—Chaly, the editor of the divisional newspaper, Major Polishchuk and Captain Leonidze were among the guests. They drank many toasts, sang songs, and laughed a great deal. Chaly told a funny story: "One American asked another why the Russians are such good fighters. The second American answered: 'It's easy for them—they are not afraid of Bolsheviks.'" Then they danced and Captain Leonidze outshone them all. Polishchuk sang Ukrainian songs. Osip recalled Kiev and saw visions of its streets and gardens. Raya and her friends were having fruit drinks at a stand and laughing. Mama was in the park with Alya, playing "one little pig went to market." . . . It was late autumn, but for some reason Osip pictured Kiev in the summer, with its dark green trees and patches of sunshine between the leaves. He drank half a tumbler of vodka and without any preface related to Minayev:

"When I first became acquainted with my wife—there was nothing between us yet—she said: 'Let's go to a concert.' We were sitting there, listening to the orchestra, when she bent over towards me and asked: 'Do you recognize it?' I didn't know anything about music, but I was ashamed to confess it, so I answered: 'Yes.' During the intermission she asked me: 'Well, what was that piece they were playing?' It was something lively—'Who Goes Through Life Singing,' or 'Carmen.' I said 'Carmen.' She looked at me as if she was seeing me for the first time and said: 'You have a wonderful ear, you have!' Actually, it was Beethoven, some symphony or other. How was I to know? But it upset me. When I got home I had a look at myself in the glass—she was right, my ears, both of them, were nothing to boast about. I had just had my hair cut, and they were sticking out something awful. Of course, I knew that Raya did not mean it literally, but still, I thought she did hint at the shape of my ears, so I went and asked my mother: are my ears ordinary ears or not? My mother answered: 'They are like your father's.' But I don't remember my father, he went away when I was little. . . . Later, after we were married, I told Raya how I had been worried about my ears and she kept teasing me about it for almost five years. . . . She doesn't write often. I can understand her. I can't force myself to write, and things are easier for me. She is a sergeant, her conditions are differ-

ent. . . I tell you, I'm homesick. . . I'd like to have a peep at Kiev! We are near it. . . My people are not there. . . They went away with the evacuees. But what a city! I am sorry you have not been there. It's wonderful there in the summer. . ."

Osip saw visions of the flashes of sunshine, the monastery, Raya's white dress, but he could not describe it.

Later Minayev said to Olya:

"He is a fine chap. It took me some time to learn what he was like. At first he used to get on my nerves. If you said anything to him, he'd always answer with a quotation from something or other; if I talked about cabbages he would come on with dialectics. But you must not think he is a dry old stick, he's not. It's his nature. . . I, for example, go into raptures, but he is shy. Do you know why a tortoise has a shell? Because it has a sensitive body. . ."

Timidly, but with inner conviction, Olya said:

"In my opinion, he's a nice man, only he is unhappy."

"Unhappy? Why?"

"I don't know. It seems to me so. . ."

"But did you see how merry he was yesterday? When he danced with you he stepped on my foot and nearly crushed it. . ."

She smiled, but said obstinately:

"He was very merry. . . But still, he is unhappy. . ."

About ten days later Osip's dream came true: the division was transferred to the Zhitomir highroad and he saw Kiev. When he emerged on the Kreshchatik he was amazed—the Kiev of which he had been thinking so much was not there. Dark ruins loomed through the cold rain. He had seen many ruined cities, but in his mind they had been associated with one thing—the war. He had always pictured Kiev as a peaceful city, as he had left it when he went away. And now he was on the Kreshchatik. Before him lay not Kiev, but this very same war. . .

He walked to Saksagansky Street—he wanted to see whether the house in which he and his dear ones had lived was still standing. To his delight he saw that it was still there. He knocked at his neighbours', the Yakovenkos; he scarcely knew them, but just now he felt as if they were his kinfolk—why, they had lived right next door . . . long ago, during the years of happiness. . . Yakovenko was in the army. Ninochka, the younger daughter, had been sent away to work by the Germans. Only Maria Nikiforovna and lame Glasha had remained. On setting eyes on the officer Maria Nikiforovna became flustered; she did not recognize Alpert, but every soldier reminded her of her husband.

"Sit down in this armchair. I have nothing to treat you to, we became very poor under the Germans. . ."

When Osip told her who he was, she began to weep.

"What's the matter?" enquired Osip.

"I am thinking of your mother. Poor woman, she came to me and said: 'They are sending us away. I don't know whether I shall live through it or not, please keep an eye on our things until my children come back.' . . . We did not know then what those brutes were contriving. Later Ninochka came and told me: 'They have slaughtered them all, the children too.' . . . I wouldn't believe it, but it turned out to be true. . . . Whenever I hear Bahby Yar mentioned I cannot keep back my tears. . . . They put a skunk in your room; he kept nosing around to see who could be sent to Germany. It was he who did my Ninochka in. . . ."

Osip heard Maria Nikiforovna relating something, but he was not really listening. He sat motionless; his face, usually stern and hard, expressed such grief that on glancing at it Maria Nikiforovna stopped talking at once, and Glasha ran into the kitchen and burst into sobs. At last Osip got up and said in a low voice:

"Good-bye, Maria Nikiforovna."

This frightened her:

"Where are you going? Sit here awhile. . . ."

"No, I'll go. . . ."

As he was going down the stairs the thought suddenly occurred to him: Perhaps she has got it all mixed up? Why, Raya had written that they had gone with the evacuees. . . . He knocked at the Kulikovs'. An old woman opened the door.

"I am Alpert," said Osip. "Were you here when the Germans came?"

"I have been here all the time. I have had a terrible time. . . ."

"Did you see my mother?"

He asked this in a tone of desperation, there was a tremor in his voice. Kulikova thought that he was accusing her of something. She hastened to say apologetically:

"We couldn't do anything. . . . Do you think they consulted us? . . . They even dragged me to the Kommandatur, I scarcely got away from there. . . . They ransacked all my trunks. . . ."

"All I am asking you is: did you see my mother and my little daughter?"

"I saw them the evening before, but when they went away I was so scared I did not leave the house. . . ."

He went to Bahby Yar. On the way he stared at the houses, at the trees and at the shell-pitted road, as if he wanted to impress on his memory every sign on the road his mother and daughter had traversed. His mind was a blank, he was not yet fully conscious of the immensity of the bereavement he had suffered; he breathed with difficulty; he heard nothing; he just walked on and on. A thought flashed through his mind: how long Lvov Street is! He did not know that that very thought had passed through his mother's mind when she was going to her death with Alyenka.

Not a soul was about. Suddenly, a man with the bleary eyes of a drunkard emerged from a hovel. Osip hailed him:

"Where's Bahby Yar?"

"Quite close. Turn to the right and you'll see it at once. I suppose you have relatives there. Other soldiers have passed here before you, and they asked. . . . Only, you won't find anything there. When the Germans realized they would have to clear out, they brought a lot of war prisoners and ordered them to dig everything up and not leave a trace. They burned the corpses day and night, it was impossible to breathe. Have you got a smoke, comrade?"

He reached Bahby Yar. In places it was no longer a yar (ravine), it had been filled in. Sand, mixed with ashes. Small, charred bones. Mama would come home with her market bag: "Osya, I have bought you some raspberries, you like raspberries, don't you? . . . What a fine house they have built opposite the theatre! . . ." He had promised Alya that he would bring her a teddy bear from Moscow and Alya had asked: "Does it bite? . . ." Friends, acquaintances, he had grown up, lived with them. . . . Osip went down on his knees and pressed his face to the cold, wet sand.

Darkness had set in long ago, but he could not tear himself away. He now thought of Raya, of the power of love which had prompted her to utter a white lie—she had taken the whole burden of grief upon herself in order to save his peace of mind. . . .

How long we lived together, and yet I did not know the kind of woman she was. I was surprised when she went to the front, fearing neither a soldier's life nor death. And she showed more fortitude—she wrote to me about Alya. What must she, the mother, have felt? . . . And I added to her sufferings by writing: "It's good that they went away. There they were all slaughtered," but I asked her about Alya, whether she had grown. . . .

And at the moment when, on the sands of Bahby Yar, he was thinking of Raya, life triumphed. It is possible to kill a defenceless person and, in fear of retribution, burn the body, scatter the ashes and put the witnesses out of the way; but it is impossible to kill the loftiest thing in man—love. Raya proved to be stronger than the murderers.

Osip was neither a good writer nor a good speaker, he was unable to give expression to what was in his heart; long ago, when still near Stalingrad, he had asked himself: Why am I so dumb, like Minayev's pup; it too must feel something, but can't express it. . . . Two days later he wrote to Raya:

"RAYA, my darling Raya, forgive me for having tormented you with questions. I know everything now. I have been to Bahby Yar. You, of course, know, without my telling you, what grief has afflicted us. Listen, Raya, we two must live through this, words will not help

either you or me, but I want to take you by the hand and say—we two are alone, a terrible thing has happened, but you and I will live, we will forget nothing, we will live with this thing in our hearts. I now know the strength of your character. This evening we are going into the front line. I don't know how many were killed in Kiev, they say seventy thousand, but figures convey nothing, they killed human beings. This cannot be forgiven. My darling, be strong! After what I have lived through in Bahby Yar I am not afraid of words, I want to say that we two are bound together forever, and that is stronger than death.

Osip."

When Minayev saw Osip, he guessed at once that something had happened, but he dared not ask. Osip said nothing. It was only several days later, when they were inspecting Minayev's sector (the Germans had brought up a fresh division, evidently they were preparing for something), that Osip said:

"Both my mother and Alya. . . In Bahby Yar. . ."

Minayev silently gripped Osip's hand. Neither of them mentioned the matter again.

The ensuing weeks were such that Osip had no time to meditate over what had happened, heavy fighting was in progress. It looked as though the spirit of the Germans had revived, that they had recalled nineteen forty-one and nineteen forty-two. It was difficult, of course, to rouse the spirit of soldiers who had retreated from Belgorod and the Donets Basin almost without stopping; the German Command had withdrawn the most battered divisions and had replaced them by divisions brought from the West. As was the case during the Battle of Kursk, the German soldiers had a holy faith in their "Tigers" and "Ferdinands." They were all enthused by the task of recovering Kiev and of showing the world that the Reds' successes had been fortuitous.

The German counter-offensive opened successfully: after fierce fighting, the Germans forced their way into Zhitomir and advanced on to Kiev. The Divisional Commander, General Zykov, ordered Osip to defend the sector through which ran the highroad and the main railway line. The General said: "The chief thing is—the trench tool."...

Regimental Staff Headquarters were situated in shallow, hastily dug trenches on the slope of a low mound.

"Put me on to Leonidze," said Osip to his adjutant.

But there was no communication with Leonidze. Minayev answered that all was quiet on his sector, except that "they were hammering away as they did on that mound, they've gone crazy."... Communication with Polishchuk was also cut, but a signalsman managed to crawl through from that sector and he reported that the Germans had reached the trenches but had been swept back, the Third Battalion was standing

fast. All this occurred at nine o'clock in the morning, but at a quarter past ten, seven "Tigers" approached the mound on which the Staff Headquarters were situated. Shells were bursting all over the place. Every now and again Osip got up and glanced around to see whether everybody was in his place. The Divisional Commander called him to the telephone.

"How is it at your end?" shouted Zykov.

"We are holding on. Twenty-six tanks. They passed through Leonidze's sector. Seven 'Tigers' here, outside the line. Ask the 'Katyushas' to have a go at them.' . . .

Two "Tigers" were wrecked, the rest veered to the right—against Polishchuk; the Third Battalion retreated. The tanks were followed up by German infantry; they forced Minayev to retreat. Towards the end of the day the Regimental Staff and two companies were surrounded. Osip smiled grimly: like it was in nineteen forty-one—instead of a regiment, I'll have to command two companies. They held on for twenty-four hours. Osip received a slight concussion, his head ached fit to burst and he wanted to vomit. A tank attack was repulsed with the aid of incendiary bottles. Towards the end of the day a division of self-propelled guns, despatched by the General, and Minayev's battalion broke through to the Staff Headquarters. Osip went off at once to Leonidze's sector to cheer up the men. Next morning the battalion launched a counter-attack and recovered a small village. That day was a relatively quiet one. General Zykov summoned Osip. Osip reported on the situation: all points had been recovered, except that Polishchuk had yet to retake a farm—it stood on an eminence and was a good position. . . . But Polishchuk had sustained heavy losses. If the reserve battalion were. . . .

"What's the matter with you?" the General asked. "You are not looking so well. . . ."

"I had a concussion. It's not serious."

"You ought to take a nap for an hour or two."

"No. I'll go and see Polishchuk."

"Wait, have a bite first."

The General poured out the vodka, just covering the bottoms of a couple of large china cups, and suddenly saw that Osip was asleep. Hell, how worn out the men are! The General tried to make as little noise as possible, but it looked as though even bursting shells could not wake Osip; he had not slept for three nights. A little later he jumped up, shook his head, and went off to see Polishchuk.

"Minayev? How is it at your end?"

"Not bad. The war is continuing it seems. . . ."

Fierce fighting raged for another four days: attack and counter-attack. Then it became quieter: the Germans gave up thoughts of Kiev. Osip slept for six hours, got up, had a wash in ice-cold water—the frost

had set in—and then suddenly felt anxious: why are there no letters from Raya? He wrote to her: alive and well, waiting for letters—"my whole life now centres in you."...

* 18 *

"Those bandits have got entirely out of hand," said Colonel Schummer. "Four trains in two weeks. . . I don't know what has pepped them up, the assassination of the Commissar General, or the Reds' offensive, but they have given us no peace since the autumn. . ."

"We are to blame too," answered Schirke. "During the ten months I have been here I have heard nothing else but: 'There's no need to stand on ceremony with the Russians.' You understand, of course, that I don't mean 'ceremony' in the literal sense. It was easier in France, that's true, but we must manoeuvre here too. The Russian soul is as dark as a forest; it is possible to go through it, but it is also possible to get lost in it. If you permit me, Herr Colonel, I'll read my plan to you. . ."

He drew a closely written sheet of paper from his brief case and began to read. Schummer listened absent-mindedly and thought to himself: Who is this Schirke? He has the rank of a major, but what is he besides that? . . . He enjoys the patronage of Kube. Poor Heinz called the Major an "impostor" and was immediately transferred to a combat unit for it. Schirke himself behaves very modestly, says that he is only a "rank-and-file worker," and even calls himself a "maid of all work." He probably has connections with Himmler. . . In any case, it will be unwise to get his back up. So when Schirke finished reading, the Colonel said:

"It's too subtle for the people here, in my opinion. One can see that you have been working in France for a long time. But try it out. . . I must say, Herr Major, that I admire your energy. . ."

Schirke did indeed work very hard. The situation depressed him. When he recalled the luncheons he had had with Berty, he smiled: my job now is to frighten savages. It's useless trying to knock nails in with a fiddle. . . But he did not complain. The situation was grave. The Reds were on the offensive; the fate of National-Socialism will be decided here in Russia. Let that mollicoddle Hubert, or that sybarite Schummer, think about saving their skins; men like that are ready to compromise with the Anglo-Saxons any minute. But I shall live only if the Third Reich lives! . . .

Although clever and observant, this man's mind was really limited; his subtlety found expression only in the intricacy of his methods and in his sharp repartee; inwardly, he remained hard and coarse, like a stone. To him, the Führer's utterances were not the expression of human

thoughts, but commandments. In Paris, to consolidate Germany's rule, he visited select restaurants, discussed poetry with Nivelle, and behaved in a free-and-easy, almost frivolous, manner. Here he slept in a log house that teemed with bed bugs, ate greasy potatoes, roamed through the town unafraid that he might be shot, and attended the Catholic Church, although he was supposed to be a Protestant according to his passport, and actually did not believe in God at all. His object was to establish order, but he was being hindered by fools and idlers.

He felt more cheerful after his conversation with the Colonel. He had long been insisting that a detachment of police be brought in from Lithuania. Only now would he be able to carry out this plan. The sheet of paper he held in his hand when speaking to Schummer contained the words "lightning conductor."... He picked upon a young policeman with a stupid face and asked him:

"How do you like the girls here?"

"I haven't touched them," answered the frightened policeman.

"The more fool you. Pick the nicest girl you can find and drag her home. Do it today..."

"I'd better wait..."

"In that case, I order you to do it. You will take a girl home tonight. Is that clear?"

The inhabitants of the town received convincing proof that the Germans were the protectors of justice: the policeman who had insulted a girl was hanged in the market place. During his talk with the Burgo-master, Schirke emphasized: "All the atrocities complained about here have been committed by the local police—Germans are not involved at all."...

In Minsk, Schirke managed to procure a supply of haberdashery and stationery; a modicum of goods appeared for sale in the local shops. The field gendarmerie arrested two baggage train men who had stolen a goose from a peasant woman. Schirke memorized about a dozen sentences in the Byelorussian language and delivered a speech at a meeting of the City Administration, in which he promised the inhabitants peace and quiet and the possibility of buying clothing and footwear in the future.

Then he got down to his main task—to clear the Nalibok forest. In this forest were hiding not only Red partisans, but also Poles who were connected with the Polish government in London. Schirke had long urged that efforts be made to reach an agreement with them, but Hubert was afraid. Now the Colonel had freed Schirke's hands. He met a representative of the "Londoners," as Schirke called them, in a forest-keeper's cottage.

"You have no love for us, naturally," said Schirke. "I don't propose to offer you our love. Why should we try to fool each other? But I know that you also hate the Russians. I propose that we conclude a

business agreement—that we suspend hostilities against each other for a time. You can clear the region of the Reds.”

Half an hour later an agreement was signed. The Poles were given the right to come into the town to make purchases, but only in the daytime, and in groups of no more than ten. Both parties engaged to conduct hostilities against the Reds. Schirke regarded this as his first victory.

The only one Schirke trusted among the local inhabitants was the Deputy Burgomaster, Vasilenko. He was a man of about thirty, a bachelor, and of feeble health. Under the Poles he had kept a small grocery store, had engaged in smuggling and composed love poems. After Soviet rule was established he wrote a play based on Byelorussian legends and entered it for a competition. As soon as the Germans arrived he presented himself at the Kommandatur. “Did the Reds persecute you?” a German officer asked him. “Physically, no,” answered Vasilenko. “But they oppressed me spiritually. I am an idealist.”

Schirke said to Vasilenko:

“I need a man with an untarnished reputation to send to the partisans. . . .”

After thinking awhile Vasilenko mentioned an assistant doctor named Pasha Kutas, a Herculean fellow, but so meek that people said in jest that he raised his hat to Colonel Schummer’s sheep dog. That night Kutas was arrested and cruelly beaten up. Next morning he was brought before Schirke.

“I am not guilty of anything,” protested Kutas.

“That may be true. The Gestapo arrested you. I had nothing to do with it. I want to suggest a way of escape to you. . . . Go to the Nalibok forest, find the partisans and say that you cannot stand this violence any longer. It is important for us to ascertain the approximate strength of the units and their signals to the aircraft. I offer you ten thousand rubles and a quiet life. . . .”

“They will kill me,” said Kutas.

“They will welcome you with open arms—you have the best recommendation that one can have; take your shirt off and show them what they did to you in the Gestapo. Furthermore, we will not release you, you will escape, and we will put an announcement in the *Minsker Zeitung* offering a reward for your capture. . . .”

Kutas sniveled. Schirke thought to himself: Why on earth did Vasilenko recommend this boob to me? I have never seen a man with eyes like that before—regular sheep’s eyes. . . . At last, Kutas consented.

“But don’t take it into your head to go over to the Reds in earnest,” said Schirke to him. “I have your written pledge to us, and if you betray our confidence, I’ll send the paper to the Soviet Commissariat for the Interior. . . .”

A week passed. Schirke waited for news from Kutas. The “Londoners” reported that they had a skirmish with the Reds during which six

Reds were killed. Not bad for a start, said Schirke to himself, but he felt depressed for all that. The counter-offensive against Kiev had petered out. The Reds were now active near Vitebsk; and it was going hard in the South. Hans had written from Angoulême that the French were becoming insolent, they were expecting an Allied landing, and terrorists were active everywhere. The period of trial was approaching. . . .

The partisans attacked a supplies column a little way outside the city. One of the bandits was caught. He was subjected to a long interrogation by the Gestapo, but they got nothing out of him. The Colonel said to Schirke:

"We'll have to hang him. I have seen him. A young man, says he is a student; he has an ordinary face, attractive if anything. . . ."

"I will talk to him if you have no objection," said Schirke. "I don't undertake to interrogate him, since the Gestapo got nothing out of him. . . . I just want to analyse the psychology of these bandits."

Schummer answered: "I don't mind." Later he said, laughing, to Hubert: "Schirke is dreaming of a literary career. He began with but-tons and will end up with a psychological novel. Almost a Dostoyev-sky." . . .

The man that was brought before Schirke had, indeed, been a student at the Pedagogical Institute. He refused to give his name; in the papers of the Gestapo he was registered as "Ivan." Schirke was astonished at his gaze—it was confident, even defiant.

"Take a seat. If you want to smoke, smoke these. If you have any objection to accepting cigarettes from the enemy, don't take them. I don't intend to interrogate you. I want to discuss general subjects with you. Who knows—perhaps I myself have doubts about the justice of our cause. . . . If you find my questions difficult to answer, don't answer them. I want to ask you: why do you hate us?"

"Difficult to answer?" The prisoner laughed. "Any child can answer that one. We hate you for having come. . . ."

"In war, someone always comes to someone else."

"You started it. . . ."

"We think that you started it; we merely forestalled you. If you are victorious, you will claim that we started it; if we are victorious, we will force you to admit that you started it. But this is uninteresting. I am thinking about something else. We have come to your country as the representatives of a higher culture, that is beyond dispute; it is sufficient to know how our men feel living in your houses which lack the most primitive comforts. You may deny the race theory, but you cannot deny facts—we are indeed superior to you. Why are you silent?"

"What can I talk to you about? Yesterday, your countrymen burnt me with red-hot irons. That's an example of your superiority!"

"Your arrogance is prompted by your sense of inferiority. Only one thing engrosses you—hatred. . . ."

"Not only that. . . ."

"What else? . . ."

Looking Schirke straight in the face, the man who called himself "Ivan" answered:

"Contempt."

"That's amusing. . . . Contempt for what? The methods of the Gestapo?"

"Not only that. For your philosophy, for your comforts, and for you personally. . . ."

"You are insolent, but I understand—you have nothing to lose. . . . There is something base in your desire to humiliate an enemy. Here am I, a German, sitting in front of you. You say that you despise me. But do you understand why I am fighting?"

"Perhaps because you are stupid—you are obeying orders, although you look more like a scoundrel than a fool. Perhaps because of greed—you sold braces in your own country, but here you are God Almighty. At best, you are fighting because you are convinced that your Germany is superior to all other countries."

"As if you are not convinced that your Soviet Russia is superior to all other countries!"

"I made a mistake in saying that you are a scoundrel rather than a fool, you are both. How can you compare self-sacrifice with self-satisfaction? Our idea is broader than our country, although you must have observed that our country is not a small one. . . ."

"Wherein lies the breadth of your idea? In the dimensions of your insolence?"

"The answer is very simple. Who are with you here? Rascals, drunkards, ne'er-do-wells. You realize that yourselves. You are even ashamed to exhibit them at official functions. But we have Thaelmann with us. I think he is the most decent German. I don't despise him, no, I respect him, even though he is a German. I despise you not because you are a German, but because you are a fascist."

Schirke waved his hand to indicate that the prisoner could be taken away. . . . The conversation had wearied him. No, you couldn't induce a man like that to change his views. . . . This is a life and death struggle—either we or they will survive. Later he said to Colonel Schummer:

"What a pity our 'Bismarckians' were not present during the conversation. They still think we can reach an agreement with the Bolsheviks. . . . Are you going to hang him?"

"I've got to. . . ."

"I would shoot a man like that. . . ."

Without realizing it himself, Schirke had been profoundly impressed by the man with whom he had just spoken. But when the Colonel asked: "So you think it would be better to shoot him?" Schirke woke

up, as it were, and answered: "No, after all, it will be better to hang him—it impresses the people more."...

He slept badly that night: he thought about the future; his thoughts were gloomy, persistent and yet disjointed; they were like a neuralgic pain, he felt that a storm was sweeping towards Germany.

The partisan who called himself Ivan was hanged on the nineteenth of December. Several evenings later, on the twenty-fourth, Schirke was having supper with Colonel Schummer. A fir tree was decorated with cotton wool and small paper flags. The Colonel's orderly had roasted a goose just to the turn. Hubert had brought a gramophone. As he heard the old song about the maiden under the linden tree, Schirke felt a lump rise to his throat: his mother used to sing that song.... Schirke was sentimental: a tale of unrequited love, a dried flower in a book, the strains of a barrel organ, or the sight of the setting sun would almost bring him to tears. At present he was inclined to melancholy thanks to the wine, the music and reminiscences. He closed his eyes and thought of nothing....

The explosion was terrific. Colonel Schummer had an arm torn off. Hubert was killed. Schirke got off with a few scratches. There was shooting in the street. When Schirke ran out into the square he saw the dead body of the sentry. He began to shout; a soldier ran up, almost demented by fear; all he could say was "bandits, bandits."... The barracks were on the outskirts of the city; there the men were celebrating Christmas Eve. No less than an hour passed before Schirke was able to ascertain exactly what had happened. Partisans from the Nalibok forest had penetrated the city. First they killed the sentries and then threw a grenade into the house where the Colonel lived. Next morning Schirke learned that Deputy Burgomaster Vasilenko had gone away with the partisans. Of Pasha Kutas there was no news whatever.

Schirke wrote to his son: "Things are difficult here now, but I am still convinced that victory will be ours. Hans, be prepared to die for the Führer and for Germany!"

* 19 *

Without losing a single man, the unit killed about twenty Germans, blew up the Colonel's house and captured a considerable quantity of arms and provisions. After taking a drink of cognac Vasilenko mused:

"When the war's over I'll write a play about the partisans and a German. You should have seen this Schirke!... I certainly will write that play, and I'll enter it for a competition."

Vasya smiled:

"Insist that I be one of the judges—you'll be certain of a first prize..."

It was Vasya who had thrown the grenade into the Colonel's house. He had insisted on it—he wanted to avenge Ivan. Afterwards he was haunted by the thought: suppose nobody was in the house. True, Vasilenko had seen the Colonel's guests arrive, but they may have gone somewhere at the last moment. . . .

Two days later they sent Nastya to the city; she came back with good news—Captain Hubert was killed and Colonel Schummer was seriously injured. Vasilenko was disappointed that Schirke was not killed. "I know him," he said. "He is the chief skunk." . . . But Vasya calmed down: they have been taught a little lesson. . . .

He could not get Ivan out of his mind: they had fought side by side for a year—Ivan escaped from the camp in Trostyanets. Often they had long talks at night. At the Institute, Ivan had studied the literature of all countries, could recite by heart numerous poems and relate the novels he had read. Vasya had called him a "walking library." And Vasya had talked about architecture—about the Pyramids and about the mansions in Moscow, about the dome of St. Sophia's which "held on by a thread," and about skyscrapers. Sometimes they talked about the affairs of their hearts. Ivan had been in love with a student girl who loved another, and, laughing, he would recite:

*'Tis an old, old story,
Yet it is ever new. . . .*

Vasya was unable to tell the story of his bliss which had lasted only one night, but which seemed to him to have been long, intricate and enigmatic; all he could do was to pronounce, sometimes, his beloved's name aloud.

In ordinary times people grow up, mature and grow old, submitting to the rhythm of the years; and about some it is said, as if speaking of some oddity, that they have retained much that is childish, and of others that they have prematurely aged. The experience that distinguishes the mature adult from a youth is acquired slowly. In a period of trial, however, one's mentality is moulded in a different way: in such a period, people both discard and acquire exceedingly quickly; the conception of age vanishes, the heart becomes hard and at the same time exceptionally receptive; the world shrinks—a hill for the soldier, a forest for the partisan; and at the same time the world expands, because the denudation of feelings and the consciousness of his vital bond with others makes a man live not one life, but many.

To Nina Georgiyevna, Vasya's character had seemed exceedingly simple. Before the war he did not live so much as observe life. Of course, he was familiar with difficulties and privation, but he knew neither danger nor temptation, the spiritual labyrinth in which many well-provided for and seemingly happy young lads in the West groped their way. What had seemed to be simplicity to the mother was adoles-

cence, which had not yet been subjected to real trials. Natasha alone had evidently felt that behind that simplicity lay a profound mind and a large heart; but Natasha was only a girl at that time, and while she had sensed the richness of Vasya's character, she could not mentally grasp it. Now Vasya often thought: if Natasha were to see me now, she would not recognize me. At times this thought frightened him: suppose they turn out to be strangers to each other? But his heart told him: no, that cannot be; they both lived for the same thing, they would understand each other at a mere glance. Several times he wrote to her, giving the letters to comrades who made their way to the "Mainland," but he did not know whether those letters reached her. On two occasions aircraft dropped arms, tobacco and newspapers for them, but no mail. He never asked himself whether Natasha was waiting for him; he knew that, after that night in Minsk, neither he nor she could love another. There were girls in the partisan unit; romance was rife around Vasya—love, jealousy and separation. The imminence of death dissolved former vows, obliterated recollections. But Vasya could think of no other woman but Natasha. More than once he pondered over the intensity of his feelings, sometimes he would jeer at himself for it, but it was enough for him to think—my little, snub-nosed darling—for this irony to vanish.

He became an excellent commander, made careful preparations for every operation and infused his own courage into his men. But on quiet evenings he would think of what life would be like when peace returned, would mentally resume his former occupations, see visions of bright, sunlit houses, and on scraps of old newspaper, before they were used for rolling cigarettes, he would draw plans of future cities. Just before the war he was enthusiastic about skyscrapers. He had doubts about them now; the idea of a skyscraper was prompted by the desire to vanquish space. But the more motor transport came into use, the more underground railways expanded, the more foolish was it to pile up storey on storey—the conquest of space puts a stop to the upward leap of bricks. Vasya dreamed of garden cities, of the style of the age which still sought expression—we have not only factories, and not only concrete! . . . Formerly, architecture had seemed to him to be industrial construction; now, he yearned more and more often for art. Technology was developing so fast, he thought, that there were no separate periods, they were all interwoven. Devilishly fascinating. . . . But still it was an illusion—the higher technology is developed, the greater is the need for material things. We here are suffering from the lack of electricity; the partisans of eighteen hundred and twelve did not feel this inconvenience. One can suffer from the absence of conditioned air, from the fact that your car has only six cylinders instead of twelve. Two years ago the Germans possessed more mechanized materiel than we did. But why did they fail to capture Moscow? Now they have invented their "Tigers," but our men are knocking hell out of them. . . . Their newspa-

pers say that they are manufacturing some sort of a "secret weapon." That won't alter anything. The Americans, too, have a highly developed technology, and no doubt they, too, have invented something. All this is astonishing; when you hear it for the first time, you open your mouth in amazement. But it is something else that decides the issue—men. It's a pity we cannot analyse the soul. Take Ivan, or Avanesyan, or Smirnov—our Soviet people, nothing distinguished about them, quite ordinary if you like, nobody knows them except their friends, if their names happen to get into the newspapers, it's by chance, but I am convinced that spiritually, they are far superior to our enemies. . . .

One day he and Ivan had discussed the question as to what was better in our country and what abroad. Vasya said: "The social system in our country is superior to that in any other country. Consequently, in many fields we are ahead of the other countries—solution of the national problem, opportunities for education for the broad masses, and so forth. Now, what have the Germans got that is better than what we have? . . ." "The Germans?" ejaculated Ivan with a contemptuous smile, he was reluctant to admit that they had anything superior, but they had agreed to discuss the question dispassionately. "Judging by their magazines, the Germans build more comfortable houses."—"Oh, that's a detail. By the way, do you like their architecture?"—"I don't know. I haven't seen many illustrations, and besides, that's your field."—"From the industrial point of view I prefer America; as for the artistic . . . I don't think anybody has beaten the Acropolis yet."—"American automobiles are better."—"But our music. . . ."—"That belongs to man's inner world."—"Exactly." Vasya became animated: "I'll tell you briefly what is better in our country—our people. That's the most important thing, in my opinion. Men can make machines, but machines can't make men." . . .

This conversation had taken place shortly before Ivan met his death. Now Vasya mused: scarcely any of the old comrades are left, Smirnov. Lunts, Rudny and I—four. . . . I have been a partisan for two and a half years. But for some reason, whenever we have a heart-to-heart talk, we all talk about life in peacetime. The people at home no doubt think that all we do is fight, that nothing else interests us, that we have been converted into the heroes of Mayne Reid, or Fenimore Cooper. But everything is simpler and yet more intricate. There is no affected romance. . . . Before Ivan went out on that operation he talked about his Milochka, then he recalled that he had seen *Three Sisters* and he said: "It's hard to understand Chekhov when you are young." . . . Those were his last words. When the newspapers arrived, everybody made a rush for them, and everybody was glad that the extension of the Metro was being proceeded with in Moscow, enquired what was on in the theatres. Perhaps this is where our strength lies: we are fighting desperately, but we have remained peaceful people. . . .

It looks as if we won't have to wait long now—our forces are

advancing. . . . But at once Vasya drove that thought away. I have allowed hope to carry me away too often. I thought—our men will be here within a month. . . . Better not think about it. They will come when they are supposed to come. We are far away now; this was Poland up to nineteen thirty-nine. . . . And yet he smiled when he thought of the Vitebsk direction. . . .

On the night of the twenty-eighth they carried out another operation. Vasya was informed that some top-rank Germans were travelling by this train. Lunts was regarded as the mine-laying expert. It was important to wipe out the traces on the fresh snow—the Germans were on the alert. Vasya and his comrades crouched at a spot about six hundred metres from the railway track. When the mine exploded, the Germans in the rear cars jumped out and scattered. The partisans' machine guns rattled. A new man took part in this operation—Pasha Kutas.

"Were you afraid?" Vasya asked him later.

"I was," answered Pasha.

"Never mind, it's always like that at first. You will get used to it. Even now I am afraid every time we go out, but I have grown used to it. . . ."

"How can you be afraid if you are used to it? . . ."

"That's just it—I've got used to being afraid. . . ."

They greeted the New Year in proper style. They heard Kalinin's speech over the radio and smiled: Fine! In Moscow, too, they are listening. . . . Then they heard the chimes of the Kremlin clock. . . . They drank a toast first to Stalin and then to the Red Army. Then they drank toasts to each other. Losev (they called him "our stores manager") had put away for the occasion three cases of German rum.

Smirnov got up:

"Let's drink to our Commander's wife, and to all wives."

A broad smile spread over Vasya's face—for that smile, Natasha had nicknamed him "Cheshire cat." A Happy New Year, Natasha! Do you know that I am alive? His heart throbbed; that was very strange. In April a shell splinter had struck his wrist and had smashed his watch—but his heart was beating. . . . That night was continuing; it had been the shortest night in the year, but it is the longest, longer than life. . . . My little snub-nosed darling! . . .

* 20 *

The division to which Raya belonged was transferred and Osip's letter was held up at the Field Post Office for two months. Raya had long been prepared for the frightful news; on New Year's Eve a war correspondent who had been in Kiev arrived, and he told her about the horrors of Bahly Yar. But in spite of that, she still cherished a hope.

How many times had she told herself that it was no use hoping, but still that hope persisted—perhaps they had managed to go to some village, or somebody had given them shelter. . . . Only after reading Osip's letter did she realize that Alya was gone.

Sergeant Kuznetsov, one of the best snipers in the division, was a burly, silent Siberian, a hunter before the war. He himself looked like a forest animal, except that he had naive, kindly eyes. One day he said to Raya: "I don't know what to call the Germans. If I call them wild beasts, it will be an insult to the bear. Would a bear attack a man when it is not hungry? Never! But all the Germans do is rend and tear. . . ." Raya was touched by his artlessness, by the purity of his heart. Nobody in the company knew that Junior Lieutenant Alpert had received bad news; but to Kuznetsov Raya said:

"I have received a letter from my husband. . . . The Germans killed his mother and our little daughter Alya. In Kiev. . . ."

There was not a tremor in her voice; she asked Kuznetsov how things were in his company—was everything O.K.—and went away. But for a long time Kuznetsov sat and wondered: How does she manage to keep so calm?

There was a time when Raya could burst into tears if Osip was the least bit abrupt with her, and she could weep for no reason at all—she used to tell Valya: "It comes over me." . . . Yes, there was plenty of everything then—sleep, bread and tears. They say that grief dries the heart as drought dries the earth. Raya's heart, however, had remained alive, responsive; but now she did not give way to tears and lamentations, she showed no sign of that outward sadness which helps one to pass from intense despair to well-ordered, everyday life. It was only from the flutter of her eyelashes and her subdued voice that one might, perhaps, have guessed that she was suffering. To herself, her personal grief seemed immeasurable and yet tiny; while, for others, days of fierce fighting alternated with daydreams, sometimes with frontline romance, and sometimes with merry laughter around the campfire, Raya was always conscious of the universal grief; it hovered over her like the black and lurid fog that hovered over the burning villages in the Smolensk Region. She recalled how her opposite number, Kostya Byelov, had died at the battalion hospital base. He was five years younger than Raya and had seemed quite a boy to her. As he was dying, he kept on talking about a girl, smiled to her with his dry, livid lips, and shouted: "Tanyechka, I'm coming, this very minute." . . . Raya recalled the day when they had found a gully in which the bodies of tiny infants with black, shrivelled faces were lying. She recalled another day: a woman was ploughing with the aid of an aged, emaciated cow; the cow collapsed from weakness and fell across the furrow, the traces were stretched taut, tears appeared in the cow's large eyes, and the woman stood near the cow and wept too. . . .

When somebody said in Raya's presence: "We'll pay them out in the same way," she would shake her head disapprovingly: we cannot do that sort of thing. No German mother will be made to feel what she had felt when she learned about Bahby Yar. "Taking revenge?" Byelov asked her one day. She answered: "No, fighting." She fought because she felt that she would know no rest until the frightful thing that the newspapers called "fascism" had been overthrown. And it was this consciousness of the necessity and rationality of the war that sustained her: the men wondered—a frail woman, and yet she bears all the hardships of trench life better than many a big, strong man. For two months she was in hospital—a shell splinter had struck her in the leg; the bone had not been affected, but the wound healed slowly. She did not write and tell Osip that she was wounded. When she was discharged from hospital the Colonel offered to send her to an officers' training course, but she declined the offer; she took up her sniper's rifle again: "I must make up for lost time." She now had fifty-three Germans to her account.

The offensive which had commenced in the hectic days of July continued without interruption. Now on one front and now on another, it broke through the enemy's dyke and swept on westward; when the fighting subsided in the South it flared up in the North; it leapt from the Dnieper to the Ilmen, from Novgorod to Rovno. The entire vast front advanced, but it advanced in jerks, as it were; the enemy could not tell where the next blow would be delivered next day. On the sector where Raya's division was posted there had not been any serious fighting for two months. Every day the artillery thundered, the bombers released their loads with great precision, and scouts scoured the enemy's lines. A sort of daily schedule worked itself out: there were slack hours, quiet roads—they studied the enemy's habits. Chubarev, Raya's opposite number, said: "This is our season—the sniper's season."...

It was a frosty, windy day. Raya said to herself: I must get my fifty-fourth today.... She was sitting in a warm dugout, waiting for Chubarev. She took out Osip's letter and read it again. The day before, on receiving the letter, she was unable to think of anything except Alya. Now she almost shrieked: "Osip!..." In a flash she realized the agony he had felt in Kiev; she became conscious of his grief, his love—inarticulate, inconspicuous—she had not been aware of it—and yet it was large, as large as life. She felt the warmth of his breath, the strength, and at the same time the childish helplessness of his broad, sinewy hands. How is it that I did not see anything? I thought he was feelingless, and yet every word sears.... I sought love in books, but love was right beside me. How strangely people are made! So much suffering is needed to make one see this simplest of all things!... She was overwhelmed by infinite pity for Osip—pity that only a loving woman can feel for a strong man whom nobody would think of pitying. I will write to him tonight and tell him everything, so that he should know that we really

are together. Life may not be as easy as it was before, but it will be real life together....

Captain Tsygankov, from the Seventh Department, entered the dugout. He was frozen, he beat his stiffened arms across his chest and breathed hard. At last his sheepskin coat thawed and gave off steam. and a blissful smile spread over the Captain's face. He said that the portable radio set had arrived and that it would broadcast the appeal of "Free Germany" for the Fritzes. and also music.

"I heard a broadcast like that last summer, on the Kalinin Front. The Fritzes adore music.... There was a lieutenant there, an interpreter, he called himself the Pied Piper of Hamelin, and composed a song about how he played on a pipe and the Fritzes crept out of their holes. It was funny...."

The German trenches were a hundred metres away. The nights were now bright—new moon. plenty of snow....

Silence reigned, but suddenly the sweet strains of music, too sweet perhaps, were heard. It was a Strauss waltz. Raya had played it.... For a moment she was lost in reflection—she recalled Kiev, happiness. The snow had a greenish tint. Over there, there is a hummock with a fir tree—that's their O.P.... Another waltz, so sad that it made you wonder how anybody could dance to it—one wanted to cry softly—in a cosy nook, near the fireside, holding a pocket handkerchief....

The Germans opened heavy fire. Captain Tsygankov swore:

"We can't get that appeal across now...."

There were no more waltzes, no silence. Raya peered eagerly into the distance.

"The fifty-fourth. Fifty-fifth."

Her fingers were numbed. Her long eyelashes were white with hoarfrost.

Captain Tsygankov couldn't calm down:

"The Fritzes here are savages. Even Strauss has no effect upon them. And we haven't sent the appeal across...."

Kuznetsov laughed:

"So you haven't put it across, what of it? They'll do without an appeal."

"But we must convert them."

"Words won't convert the likes of those.... Now, she has converted two of them, that's a fact!"

Raya was warming herself in the dugout. Her face was burning; she felt drowsy. A messenger burst into the dugout and barked:

"Comrade Junior Lieutenant, the Colonel wants to see you!"

Softly he added:

"He wants to congratulate you. You can go through the woods. The Fritzes never shoot at this time of the night...."

Raya picked her way among the fir trees. Suddenly came a heavy

snowfall. The wind died down. A waltz was running through Raya's mind—a sad, silly tune. She was not thinking of the Germans she had shot, nor of her coming conversation with the Colonel. It seemed to her that she was walking with Osip in the Svyatoshin woods—just after they were married they went to a rest-home and celebrated the New Year there. . . . Osip had his arm round her waist, but did not say anything. The snow whirled, and the strains of music whirled in her head. And silence reigned, such silence as there had never been in the world before.

A shell shattered several fir trees. When the messenger, who had been following Raya some distance behind her, ran up to her, she no longer breathed.

"What a stupid accident!" shouted the Colonel.

Then he was angry with himself: "Why stupid. . . . Everything here is stupid, and everything is logical—it's war. . . . But I'm sorry for her. She was a fine girl. . . ."

After Raya was buried, her rifle was solemnly presented to sniper Kuznetsov. He began in a firm voice:

"I pledge myself to smite the hated enemy. . . ."

Then his voice broke. He blinked his eyes and said softly, as if he were speaking to himself:

"She was suffering great grief. They killed her little girl. I will never forget that. . . ."

He raised the rifle above his head, and then he put it to his lips and kissed it tenderly.

* 21 *

Christine thought she was very ill: she saw double, she was tormented by palpitation of the heart one moment and by nausea another. Fussner, the camp doctor, said:

"It's nothing serious. Symptoms of age, and nerves. What I mean is: the critical age of a woman, and Germany's critical situation. . . ."

Fussner was too free with his tongue! Only recently he said to Christine:

"Dentists are thinking of pulling teeth through the nose."

She did not understand what he meant, so he explained:

"Nobody dares to open his mouth. . . ."

Several days before, Christine had visited her old friend Aennchen—they had a party to celebrate the recovery of Aennchen's brother Richard who had been wounded on the Eastern Front. Aennchen's relations, the Halles, husband and wife, who had recently arrived from Berlin, were at the party. Frau Halle, a stout, asthmatic blonde, cackled:

"It's simply awful! Fritz fell ill and now has to take violet ray treatment. It's not surprising. He was going up when the house caught

fire and the elevator got stuck. They told Fritz to jump, but his legs were numbed. It's a perfect nightmare! I bought him a Sèvres vase for his birthday, you can't buy anything decent in the shops now, but this was a splendid vase, a man on leave had brought it from France, he wanted five hundred marks for it, he sold it for a hundred and fifty, but it must be worth a thousand. Doctor Winter said it was a museum piece, and can you imagine, that vase was smashed, too! . . ."

"I can't understand why they permit these terroristic raids," said Christine. "There's surely a convention. . . . Herr Kirchhoff told me yesterday that his brother-in-law was in the basement, the ceiling collapsed and he was buried under it."

Richard laughed in a funny way:

"Buried, you say? That happens sometimes. . . . As far as I am concerned, I prefer all the bombing in the world to Russian artillery."

They talked about the war prospects. Herr Halle said:

"The news is sad, if anything, but we must not be downhearted. . . . The Führer said that his nerves will hold out, and that's the main thing."

Frau Halle put her handkerchief to her eyes:

"My nerves have given way already. . . ."

Richard again laughed in that funny way:

"The Führer said—'To be, or not to be? That is the question.' . . . I saw *Hamlet* before the war. I didn't like it. But it would be interesting to know how this is all going to end. . . ."

"It will end well," answered Herr Halle. "The Russians are counting on a second front, but they'll be disappointed. The Allies won't even land this year; for six months they have been pottering around between Naples and Rome."

Doctor Fussner, who had been busy mopping up the pork and sauerkraut and so far had taken no part in the conversation, wiped his moustaches with his hand and said, smiling:

"Do you think the Russians need a second front now? Not at all! . . . But what do you think a businessman here said to me the other day? He said: 'I hope they land before the Reds get here.' . . ."

"Shame!" exclaimed Herr Halle.

Richard chuckled. Christine felt that tears were choking her and she ran into the hall.

She had been serving in the camp for eighteen months. Russian faces and Russian songs had become revolting to her. If she had her way she would kill them all. . . . Some of those savages pretended to be obedient, and one of them even told Christine that she wanted to stay in Germany after the war. Christine did not believe her. She did not believe any of those Russian girls—they all wanted Germany to be defeated. One had only to see how glad they were about the air raids! . . . Christine had tried everything—slapping their faces and talking to them kindly. But nothing was of any use—they hated her. And

Christine was frightened: if the Reds force their way into Germany, those sluts will strangle her.

Christine detested Galya most of all. That singing girl was the ringleader—the other girls heeded her, and she incited them. A girl in her position should be down in the dumps, but every now and again she bursts into a merry laugh. And on top of it all, the men like her. . . . One day Christine went to the factory—Herr Kirchhoff had asked her to send red-haired Olya to do some washing for him. It was the lunch interval. Galochka was sitting on a crate; a Frenchman was sitting beside her. Christine could not help admiring him; he looked like a picture—fine oval face, Roman nose and dark, flashing eyes. . . . The young couple were so absorbed in conversation that they failed to notice Christine. She did not understand what the Frenchman was saying, but he was speaking with such unusual ardour that she stopped dead. He must be making love to her. . . . Oh, those Frenchmen! They are really crazy! Can a German talk like that? Even when we were engaged, Gustav always talked in calm and measured tones. . . . That girl is lucky. What can they see in her? She's got a nose like a button. Christine shouted irritably:

"What are you doing here?"

"This is lunch time," answered Galochka coolly.

Christine wanted to slap her, but she restrained herself: it was enough that the Russians hated her; why should she incur the displeasure of the French? . . .

Galochka often asked herself with virginal severity what her relations with Pierre were—friendship, or something more? . . . They never discussed this subject; they met only where people were about; sometimes Pierre would stealthily stroke Galochka's hand and whisper "darling." She called him Petya. He had learnt to speak Russian; he mispronounced the words, but spoke fluently. Sometimes, on a Sunday, they managed to meet on the bank of a little muddy river which glinted with rainbow patches of oil. Not a tree, nor a bird, was visible—only slag, brick walls and soot; but those walks seemed heaven to them. On Monday they would start guessing again whether they would be able to meet next Sunday.

Pierre was aware that he had fallen in love with Galochka. But he was also aware of something else: he had not much longer to live. The French doctor had told him quite frankly: "One lung is finished. And under these conditions. . . ." To many in the camp, death seemed a relief; but Pierre did not want to die—he had only just learned what life is.

Before the war Pierre had not given much thought to what went on around him; he would assume a slightly ironic tone when anybody in his presence talked about the necessity of remoulding society. He was fond of repeating his father's favourite aphorism: "The more things change, the more they remain the same." Dr. Morillot had succeeded in

imbuing his sons with the belief that scepticism was a sign of maturity; decent people despised the existing order, but realized that a better one would never come. René, the older son, would sometimes argue with his father, but Pierre had had no time to understand these things; when the war broke out he was still a dreamy and fun-loving boy. And even the war seemed, at first, to be a rather stupid game—some asserted that Daladier was defending human values, others, on the contrary, argued that this was all nonsense, that it was a fight for markets and raw materials.

The prisoner-of-war camp became Pierre's school of life. It was a hard school. The men in the camp sank lower and lower into degradation; all the worst that was in them came to the surface. There were cynics who said: "The chief thing is to come out alive. Pétain or a republic—it makes no difference." There were scoundrels who were ready to betray their fellows at any moment. There were dreamers who, in the cold and hungry nights, recalled the idyll of prewar France—the bowers on the Marne where anglers plucked jasmine and loving couples ate fried gudgeon. There were the unthinking ones who found comfort in the homemade sausage they received through the Red Cross Society, or in the hurried embraces of German grass widows whose husbands were away at the front. Scarcely any of the prisoners had seen actual fighting; all they knew about the war was the barbed wire of the camp.

Galochka became the source of life for Pierre; he was sustained by the bubbling spirits and merriment of this proud and modest girl. When she told him how she had copied the tattered leaflet in Kiev, he reflected: "Yes, that life is worth living." . . . Often she begged of him: "Tell me something. You know so much." . . . He had read much and remembered what he had read, he was able to re-tell in an interesting way the novels he had read, and he talked about different countries as if he had visited them. Sometimes Galochka imagined that she was a student and Pierre a professor, although she was five years older than he. One day she said:

"You know ever so much more than I do."

He answered:

"Perhaps. . . . But what you know is bigger."

They were strolling along the bank of the dirty little river. A keen winter wind was blowing. Pierre was in a mournful mood, and he coughed. Wanting to comfort him, Galochka said: "I feel good being with you, Petya," and she blushed. He answered: "I feel good too." . . .

But he did not come to work on Monday. He had not told Galochka of the disease with which he was afflicted. She had asked him sometimes what was wrong with him—for he coughed, and if he lifted any weight he would burst out in perspiration. But he would answer: "Nothing much. Chronic bronchitis." . . . He did not come to work the next day. Only now did Galochka realize how attached she had become to him. What is

the matter with him? Is he ill? Or have the Germans transferred him to another camp?

Several days later, Roger, Pierre's friend, said:

"Pierre is in the hospital. I have been to see him. He asked me to tell you not to worry...."

But Roger himself looked troubled, and Galochka guessed that Pierre was seriously ill. At once Galochka was plunged into gloom. That night, after making sure that all the other girls were asleep, she buried her face in her pillow and cried for a long time. She could not let the others see her grief, she knew that she must always appear cheerful; if the laughing girl began to mope, what would become of the others?...

The two years of captivity had done their work; more and more often tearstained faces could be seen in the barracks. Galochka tried to convince the girls that they had not much longer to suffer; but in vain. Until recently, many of them had received postcards from home, but now that the Red Army had liberated almost the whole of the Ukraine, the last contact was broken, and home seemed further away than ever.

Every other day Fräulein Strossenreuter, a German woman from Riga with a huge, pimpled nose, would come to the barracks. She told the girls that not a single house had been left standing in the Ukraine. "The Bolsheviks are done for," she said.

Before Pierre fell ill, Galochka used regularly to tell the girls the news; the French doctor listened to the broadcasts from London. Now this was more difficult. Roger worked in a different shop, and for the life of him he could not remember the names of the Russian towns. Galochka would say to him sternly:

"Get to know exactly. If you are Pierre's friend...."

Christine had been positively unbearable the last few days. One day she made the girls a present of some fancy buttons made of plastics; with tears in her eyes she said she loved them. But that very same evening she rushed at Varya, accused her of having stolen her compact, and beat her. Later, she found the thing in her own room, and in order to wipe out the impression of this ugly scene she said to Galochka:

"Why not arrange a singsong on your next free evening? You can invite the girls from the other barracks, I'll have no objection. You may sing songs and recite poems.... Choose one of the girls' birthday and have a little celebration."

Galochka promptly answered:

"All right!"

She suggested to the girls that they celebrate Red Army Day.

"It'll make Christine wild," said Varya.

"She won't know. We won't tell her what we are celebrating. We'll simply choose that day...."

They tidied up the barracks. They sang several songs. Christine sat, nodding her head approvingly: they were mournful songs and they har-

monized with her mood. The thought ran through her mind: I will be killed and nobody will pity me. . . .

Galochka wanted to tell the girls from the other barracks about the Red Army's offensive—Roger had got everything right the last time he told her the news. So she began to recite:

*There is a map, and on this map
There's Novgorod, Pushkin, Luga and Gatchina.
The town of Gdov on Lake Peipus' shore.
Celebrations in Kirovograd,
In Mozyr, Sarny, and many more.
In Smyela, Rovno and Lutsk they're glad.
Already they're celebrating right near Vinnitsa.
And soon they will do so in Odessa.*

The girls laughed. One of them, unable to restrain herself, exclaimed:

"Mama is free! . . ."

Christine couldn't understand what it was all about. The girls' merry faces made her angry. What's making them so glad at this frightful time? Even Aennchen's brother, a man and a soldier, broke down and wept at the railway station. . . . It's that Galochka, she's made them all laugh again. The impudent hussy! . . .

"What was that you recited?"

"A birthday congratulation."

"Whose birthday is it?"

Some of the girls giggled. Galochka, keeping a straight face, answered:

"Mine."

Christine kept herself under restraint and the evening passed off smoothly. But Christine could not sleep all night. Those hussies are gloating over our misfortune! . . . And I have to live with them. Isn't it awful? . . . She felt as if her heart would burst with rage. The storm broke two days later. Suddenly, Christine hurled herself upon little Nastya. Nastya was lame and walked with the aid of a stick. Why she was brought to Germany, nobody could tell. When the girls went to work, she hobbled behind the rest. Christine bawled at her: "Hurry up!" Nastya answered softly: "I can't." Christine snatched the stick out of the girl's hand and beat her with it. Beside herself with rage, Galochka rushed up to Christine and slapped her face.

Galochka was taken to prison. Sitting in the dark cell, she mused: Pierre will get better, the Red Army will come and we'll go to Kiev together. . . . She did not know what awaited her: the chief-warder of the prison yelled that she would be shot, and a wardress jeered at her and said: "You'll be sorry they didn't finish you off here." . . . She was not

kept in prison long. When they were taking her to the mustering centre she saw Roger. He was handcuffed. He managed to say to her:

"I was arrested. . . . I swore at one of their officers. . . . Pierre died on the twenty-sixth. I went to see him the day before. He asked me to tell you if I saw you that he was thinking of you, that he wants to go home, and after that he said that the Russians have captured another big city, I have forgotten which. . . ."

Galochka never learned that Pierre kept repeating her name when he was dying; to the last he could not pronounce it properly, but whispered: "Galyoshka. . . . Galyoshka. . . ."

* 22 *

"I would define the Nazis as bi-verbal," said Professor Dumas to the Dutchman Koster. "‘Heil Hitler,’ ‘Juden erschießen,’ ‘England verrecke,’ ‘Verrückte Franzosen,’ ‘Sieg Heil.’ . . . This, then, is the new race. It was created in less than ten years. A rubber club in their hands, they eat, defecate, imagine they are demi-gods, and express all their semi-divine thoughts in two words."

Koster was a cigar merchant from Utrecht. He was arrested for sheltering a Jew. He gazed at Dumas with admiration: a professor at the Sorbonne, and yet he could be humorous when one wanted to scream in mortal terror. . . .

When Lancier heard that Dumas had been sent to a German concentration camp, he went to see Nivelle:

"He is neither a Communist nor a Jew. And besides, cher ami, sixty-eight is not the age for such experiments! For old times' sake, I beg of you in the name of poor Marceline. . . ."

"I am powerless in the matter," answered Nivelle. "Dumas behaved too recklessly. When he insulted me, I tried to forget it. But not everybody is so broadminded. . . . He is in no danger, however; as far as I know they have sent him to Weimar. That's Goethe's town, the most idyllic spot in Germany. . . ."

Greatly relieved, Lancier said to Marthe:

"It appears that it's not so bad with Dumas. Dr. Morillot likes to pile on the colours. I am afraid Léo is in a worse plight. Poor Léo, when you come to think of it, he did not deserve such a fate, but facts are facts; to them he is primarily a non-Aryan. . . ."

Above the long barracks and wide compound, where men were flogged and hanged, towered the chimneys of the crematorium; they belched black, suffocating smoke. They called this the "slow death camp." Here, prisoners were not asphyxiated with gas; they died of exhausting toil in the mines or in the underground munition works, they died of hunger and thirst, of heat or of cold, of dysentery, consumption, dystrophia, of

anaemia, of rubber clubs or of leather riding whips. They were brought here from Minsk, from Prague, from Belgrade, from Paris, from Oslo, from Warsaw, from all the cities that the Germans had captured—partisans and bewildered civilians, Communists and clergymen, silent fighters in the underground and lovers of innocent anecdotes, dynamiters and loafers. And among them were German offenders—desperate opponents of the regime, and supporters who had despaired of it. They all wore the striped clothing of convicts. They worked until they dropped. They were guarded by young S.S. men and fierce, well-trained police dogs. When a prisoner dropped dead, he was dragged to the crematorium; and over the idyllic oaks and pines, about which Nivelle had once written by Schirke's order, hovered a cloud of smoke—human flesh was burning.

It was a good thing Marie could not see the old professor eating a hogwash made of potato peelings out of a rusty bowl, twisting rope and cleaning latrines. The amazing thing was that he still kept on his feet. His powerful constitution saved him. All the members of Dumas' family were long-lived, and his grandfather, a silversmith, was famous—born in the time of Napoleon, he greeted the twentieth century with a glass of champagne and told a reporter who wanted to interview him: "I am too old for the girls to be interested in me, but not old enough to be written about in the newspapers." Dumas put one in mind of an old, rugged tree in France. For all that, he would have collapsed long ago had he not been sustained by the passionate desire to live to see how this would end. To the men in his barracks he would say: "It would be silly to die now; it would be like capitulating. We must hold on until the bi-verbalists go."...

Wearily though he was, he slept little. In the middle of the night, when the dogs barked, he recalled the distant past, the nineteenth century, frivolous and heroic Paris with its "damned poets," anarchists, Communards who returned from Cayenne, the fiacres and Dreyfusards: he recalled Pasteur's lectures, Jaurès' passionate orations, Zola, who, adjusting his pince-nez, told the young student Dumas who intended to write a naturalistic novel: "Young man, literature is primarily the service of truth."... Dumas lived according to the behests of men whom he remembered—Curie and Berthelot, Mechnikov and Reclus; all his life he had firmly believed in the triumph of knowledge. But the encyclopaedists were followed by the bi-verbalists. People dreamed of prolonging human life but saw the establishment of slow death camps.... Dumas wanted to live to see liberation—otherwise, life would seem unfinished, like a book from which the last page had been torn.

Dumas fought death every day, every hour. He knew that the main thing was not to yield a single step: he was courteous to everybody, tried to wash thoroughly, although that was next to impossible, continued to think of his scientific work. He had no books; he suffered from that and tried to recall what he had read long ago. Often he repeated the

words of Pascal: "Man is but a reed, weakest in nature, but a reed which thinks. . . . A drop of water is enough to kill him. But were the Universe to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which has slain him, because man can think of death, and the blind forces cannot think. Thus, all our dignity therefore consists in thought." . . . He comforted his friends in misfortune: he knew that Koster wanted cheering up, so he told him Marseilles anecdotes; he initiated Franz, the Czech, into the problems of modern anthropology; with the Parisian Ducray he recalled all the Metro stations, from the Place d'Italie to the Place d'Etoile. He eagerly absorbed everything that reminded him of diverse and complex life. There was a Russian officer in the barracks named Yevstigneyev who had made two attempts to escape from a prisoner-of-war camp. Dumas struck up a friendship with him, began to study Russian, questioned Yevstigneyev about the work-day system of remuneration in the collective farms, about the habits and customs of the Nentsi, and about the Moscow ballet. The aged professor was interested in everything. Before the war Delard had bred rabbits at a place near Toulouse, and Dumas eagerly listened to what he said about the diseases rabbits were subject to. He could even be interested in what Koster said about the light tobacco leaves obtained from Sumatra, although he had never smoked cigars. He sustained the others by his own intrinsic cheerfulness. Ristitsch said: "At one end of the camp there is the crematorium, at the other there is Dumas—the professor here represents life."

This was on a troubled day in the early spring; the sun was already warm, but a cold wind blew from the mountains. Dumas and Koster had been ordered to carry the bodies of those who had died from the barracks to the crematorium. Dumas looked at the faces of the dead who had had joy, blood and life slowly squeezed out of them; among these dead there were Frenchmen, Russians, Serbs and Poles, there were dark faces and fair, nearly all were young. . . . Suddenly Dumas felt mortal weariness overcome him; the pulsation of his heart slowed down, perspiration broke out on his face. At this moment the gang foreman Erick, a German Communist, who had been a prisoner since nineteen forty-one, came up and whispered to Dumas:

"The Russians have entered Rumania. . . ."

Dumas felt life return to him once more. If they have advanced from the Volga to the Prut, they will soon be here. I must live to see them! . . .

One day he told Erick about Anna—he wanted to emphasize that he had met good Germans. Erick sighed:

"There are very few of our kind. . . ."

Dumas tried to comfort him as he had once comforted Anna:

"There will be more later on. The important thing is that you exist. . . . There can be no frontier now that will allow the twentieth century to reign in one country and the tenth in another. The war will

bring about great changes. These bi-verbalists are done for. That means that Germans will learn to think again. . . ."

Dumas laughed—the Russians were already teaching them and teaching them thoroughly, but he did not say this to Erick; he was touched by this wizened and stubborn German; he said to himself: of course they are few, but one like that is worth a thousand of those who calmly slip a voting paper into a ballot-box and then go home to their dinner. Communists are possessed of an inner strength—there is no need to ask whether a man is a Communist, you can see that at once; they keep up well, help their fellow prisoners and do not give way to despair. No doubt that is the way the early Christians behaved when they had, not to light a taper in church, but face tigers in the arena. . . . The Russians have shown the world what man is capable of when he is convinced that his cause is just. . . .

S.S. man Hagen was in a rotten mood: he had learned that morning that Oberscharführer Kloss intended to send him to France. Of course, France wasn't such a lousy place, but everybody was saying that war would start there in the summer. . . . And Hagen felt that he hated the French. The skunks! They waited four years, and now they must be preening themselves. . . .

Roll call. The prisoners in the unfit-for-work barracks lined up; Professor Dumas was on the extreme right of the front rank, Hagen strode up to him and without a word hit him with his club. Dumas didn't turn a hair. Hagen struck him again and yelled:

"Not a sound, eh? One would think you are not aware that you are being thrashed!"

"I try not to notice it," answered Dumas calmly. "I have lived too long and have thought too much to pay attention to a thing like that."

Hagen quickly strode away: he thought the old man had gone crazy, and he had been afraid of lunatics since childhood.

That night Koster asked the professor:

"How could you keep silent?"

"I wouldn't have uttered a sound had he hit me a hundred times—I did not want to squeal. Pascal knew this three hundred years ago: they can kill me, but since I think, they are powerless against me. . . ."

* 23 *

The weather was glorious. Gazing at the budding chestnut trees and at the pale, baby green of his garden, Lancier was ready to forget the impending danger. But the newspapers, the radio and his acquaintances soon brought him back to reality. The Allies might land any day. When they did, the Germans would round up all males and put them in

concentration camps. There will be bombing night and day. . . . Even Marthe, who was usually calm, wept every now and again. Lancier put on a brave air, recalled Verdun, and said that war is more awful when you worry about it than when you are at the front. But he could not calm his fears. Suppose they have put me on the black list? At the last moment Roy may do me in—say that Louis is in England, that Mado has gone away somewhere and has got mixed up with the terrorists, that my former partner is a Jew, that I invited Communists, even Russians, to my house. . . . Quite enough to get me put up against the wall and shot. But an hour later, something else tormented Lancier: the Germans will be kicked out and ruffians armed with revolvers will come and say: "You appropriated Léo Alpert's shares! That's one. You wrote an obituary article about Berty! That's two. You worked with Pinaud for the Germans! That's three. Enough!" And they'll shoot me. . . . One need not believe Henriot's speeches, but everybody knows that half the maquisards are simply bandits. And the other half are fanatics. . . . And Lancier thought in horror: If only it would start soon! The most awful part about it is the waiting. The chestnut trees are blooming, spring is coming, but I don't know how long I have to live. . . .

He had got used to Pinaud. A man can get used to all sorts of things. . . . To be candid, everybody had got used to the Germans. Of course, Pinaud is not Roy, he's an honest man, but how primitive! The prewar years—the evening parties at Corbeille, Léo's jokes, talk about first nights and openings of art exhibitions—seemed a lost Paradise to Lancier. Was Pinaud capable of appreciating Valéry's poems? He has probably never heard of such a poet. . . . For me, the German occupation is an intricate tragedy; it is enough to remember what pain Louis' departure caused me, but Pinaud looks at everything from the crude materialist point of view: "It is possible to work with the Germans." . . . And I may be killed because of my connection with Pinaud, although nothing binds me to him except money. . . .

It was precisely in such reflections that Lancier was wrapt when Pinaud turned up. It was an unusual time for him to come, so Lancier guessed at once that he had something important to communicate to him. But Pinaud was in no hurry; he related rumours about the forthcoming landing, complained of a pain in the small of the back and commented on the fine weather. Lancier fumed: What's he dragging it out for? . . .

They had been in partnership for over a year and there had been no friction between them. Pinaud still thought Lancier a bit harebrained and sometimes a patronizing tone could be detected in his voice. This offended Lancier, but he soon forgot his resentment. They rarely met out of business hours, and when Pinaud suddenly began to talk about friendship, Lancier was disturbed.

"I think everything will change within a few months, but we will not part; after all, we have gone through the worst times together. . . ."

"Are you convinced that it will all be over within a few months?"

"I am."

"Did Verneuil tell you that?"

"No. I rarely meet him now. As a matter of fact, our ways have parted. . . ."

Lancier could not believe his ears. Fancy Pinaud repudiating his son-in-law! . . . This is indeed a sensation! Obviously, the Germans are in a very bad hole. . . .

Pinaud continued:

"You know that I have regarded the German occupation as an inevitable evil. It is one thing to tolerate the devil, but to serve him voluntarily is quite another. Verneuil is a mere whippersnapper; he played and lost. . . ."

Lancier could not restrain himself:

"But what's going to happen to us? We are in an awful position. . . . They will not forgive us—for collaborating with the Germans."

"Who will not forgive us?"

"The terrorists. . . . I am using the term the Germans employ, but you know whom I mean, the maquis, or patriots, as they call themselves."

Pinaud smiled condescendingly:

"You must not take them seriously. I see that Henriot's speeches have affected you too. You know that I can't tolerate the Communists. At best, they are dangerous utopians. But who will permit them to establish their order. Happily, we are not Poland, the Russians will not get here. The Americans will, and they are normal people like you and me. I don't know what de Gaulle is thinking, but there are many very sober-minded people in his entourage. Men like you and me are regarded as honest Frenchmen—I have definitely learned that. . . . I will not mention names—the Germans are still in Paris. . . . I have come to reassure you. And to warn you. This is not nineteen forty-two. . . . I would advise you to give up some of your acquaintances."

"But I. . . ."

"I know you are not interested in politics, but I have met Nivelles at your house. He is in bad odour, like Verneuil. It will be better if you give up meeting him. Do it cautiously, of course. . . . Fellows like that can do you a lot of harm at the last moment. You are too trustful, my dear Monsieur Lancier, I am telling you this as a friend. These are evil times. . . . Let's stand by each other and we'll pull through. . . ."

When Pinaud went away, Lancier reflected: I was unjust to him. The whole trouble is that I am an aesthete, I am doped by art, I judge people by appearances. Obviously, Pinaud has the exterior of a hard businessman, but he has the heart of a genuine Frenchman. . . .

All this put Lancier in an excellent mood and he decided to invite his old friends—Dr. Morillot and Sembat—to supper; in inviting them

he said with significant emphasis: "Nivelle will not be there." . . . Sembat readily accepted the invitation, but Morillot needed a lot of persuasion. The doctor had become very unsociable lately: he was crushed by bad news—Pierre had died in a prisoner-of-war camp, and René was arrested—happily the Germans took his false papers as genuine and deported him to East Prussia. He had received official notification of Pierre's death; later, a prisoner of war, released because of bad health, arrived and told him that Pierre had also been in the list of repatriates, but the list was mislaid and could not be found for six months. When that prisoner of war told Morillot that before he died Pierre had been friendly with a Russian girl, he turned his head away and wiped his eyes with a large khaki handkerchief.

Lancier prepared a modest supper, which was to be enriched by a few bottles of old Bordeaux. Lancier preferred Bordeaux now. He said: "Burgundy is for the young—it is a wine for exciting adventures and a sound liver. But Bordeaux warms the heart of those who have entered their sixth decade." . . .

"Let us drink to the coming summer, it is going to be a stormy one," said Lancier significantly.

They all clinked glasses. Lancier was overcome with emotion: The old friends had met! . . . Poor Marceline was not with them. It made no difference to her who would win the war, she would not come back. Nothing was known about the children. Perhaps they have perished? Dumas is not here. What has happened to him? You couldn't believe Nivelle, he is voluntarily serving the Germans. . . . Léo, perhaps, has failed to stand the ordeal. There is his place, in the corner, under the lamp. . . .

"Let us remember the departed," said Lancier in a low voice. "We have survived, as if in an ark during a flood—three of us. . . ."

Morillot, who had been silent up till now, said:

"Marie came to see me. She still cannot believe that Dumas has been sent to a concentration camp. She keeps running to the Kommandatur and insisting that they should take a parcel for him. . . . But who knows whether he is alive or dead? . . ."

"Nivelle says that he is in no danger, but I don't believe Nivelle, he has played and lost." Marthe looked at her husband in surprise, and feeling her eyes upon him, Lancier blushed. "Yes, I did believe him. I regarded him as a decent fellow. I am misled by art. You understand what I mean, don't you, Sembat? . . ."

"No. Nivelle is a wretched imitation. And besides, I detest art."

"I thought you lived for it. . . ."

"I do, but I detest it. Even genuine art. . . . We pose as prophets. But what do we do? We sing. But others set the tunes. . . ."

Lancier decided that Sembat had had too much Bordeaux, and besides, he did not want to argue—everything inclined one towards sweet melancholy. So Lancier answered:

"Your landscapes in this room sustained me during hours of despair. And here is Mado's pitcher with wild flowers. Where is she now? . . . Perhaps she is dead. . . ." Tears could be detected in Lancier's voice. "Look at the subtle colouring! No, mon ami—art is the loftiest thing in the world. When I said that art often misled me, I meant something else. . . . I judge many things by outward appearances. That is my weakness. I believed Nivelles only because he is a poet, a man of subtle feeling, able to convey an idea tersely, like a paradox. Now I see that the King is naked. . . . Pinaud seemed to me to be a man without feeling only because he is outwardly coarse and looks like a cattledealer. Later on I saw that he is shrewd, plays his hand well, but I did not suspect that he had a noble heart. Now I see that he is a genuine Frenchman, he is waiting for liberation, just as we are. I did not invite him this evening only because I wanted to meet my old and most intimate friends."

"A good thing you did not invite him," said Sembat.

And Morillot chuckled:

"Pinaud—an honest Frenchman? My God! If that's so, who is a rascal? He has made more money under the Germans than he ever made in his life."

"What would you have? We are all in the same boat. . . . But Pinaud hates them. He told me that himself, quite frankly."

"I should say so! We are now in May nineteen forty-four. He talked differently two years ago. But now that Herr Schmidt is packing his trunks, the room must be aired and the bed linen changed—for soon Mr. Smith will arrive. Am I right or wrong?"

"Are you putting the liberators on a par with the oppressors?"

"I? No. . . . But Pinaud is. . . . It makes no difference to him what the colour of the currency is. Do you know what the most disgusting part about it is? I am treating him. He's got something wrong with his kidneys. Tell me, Sembat, why must I heal people whom I detest? I sound them, tap them, write out prescriptions, rejoice when they recover. Yes, yes, I want even that rascal to get well. . . ."

Sembat smiled:

"Well, don't. There are plenty of other doctors. . . ."

"Whom am I to treat, then? Pierre? He is dead. . . . It's bad to be old and to have no faith. . . . Your narcissus are wonderful, Madame Lancier. . . ."

And Dr. Morillot buried his big, hairy face among the flowers.

It was a rainy spring and the world looked unfinished, as it must have looked at its creation, when the firmament had not yet been divided from the waters. Mud became one of the elements which threatened to

devour these indefatigable men. They hauled pieces of field artillery and ammunition cases on their shoulders. Before the German captain knew where he was, he found himself a prisoner. He asked Minayev:

"How can you advance on roads like this?..."

Minayev smiled:

"Don't you know that we adore muddy roads? We can't move when it's dry. We are such queer people..."

After telling Osip how they had captured the German captain who had got stuck in the mud, Minayev added, laughing:

"I said to him: 'Clean yourself up,' but he wouldn't. 'I couldn't do it in a year,' he said. ... They like to fight in comfort: motorized infantry dashing down the road, to the right a signpost, 'To India,' later on another signpost, 'To Complete Victory. Magnificent View of the Conquered Space. Buffet and Orchestra.'"

They pushed on without stopping because they were fed up with pushing, because, beyond the mud, beyond the aspen groves, beyond the clay-walled huts, beyond the grey curtain of rain loomed Berlin, because more and more often there was a note of longing in the letters from home—it will soon be three years. ... They pushed on under the pouring rain; suddenly a cold wind would rise; the men, drenched to the skin, pushed on shivering with cold and thinking to themselves—perhaps our clothes will dry now; but again the rain came down in torrents; drops of perspiration mixed with the raindrops on their faces as they dragged guns out of the mud; and then they pushed on further, without fervour, without intoxication, rather with grim concentration, and that sense of relief which a man feels when he begins to realize that the long, hard period of trial is drawing to a close.

It seemed as though little had changed during the past year. In the same way as he had done the year before, Osip inspected hummocks, hollows, copses and bogs in search of a gap in the enemy's defences. In the same way Sergei's sappers hauled logs and erected small bridges. In the same singsong voice, like a spiritualist calling up ghosts, Olya would repeat for hours: "Rosette, this is Mignonette." In the same way Pichugin, a member of the staff of the divisional newspaper, swotted over his poems. In the same way Krylov extracted pieces of iron from the insides of human bodies. In the same way General Zykov stood swearing in front of a map streaked with different coloured pencil lines and grumbled: "They took Chadushkin away from me and they want me to capture Syeltsy..." In the same way the vast army advanced—and it looked like the migration of nations, of towns that lived a nomad life, of a country marching along the roads, and where there were no roads.

But much had changed since last summer; then the advance looked like a spurt, a leap forward; every man vaguely thought to himself: suppose it peters out?... Now the advance was constant, a matter of

everyday life. Everybody was convinced—we shall not stop until we get there; but the going was hard, almost impossible. Feet sank into the mud, eyelids closed from weariness. Marching side by side with his men, General Zykov thought to himself: we are sleepless, truly sleepless!... And thinking that, he pushed on further, churning up the mud.

Sergeant Gubenkov was wounded; he went to get the wound dressed and then returned to the line. Minayev said to him:

"Go to the hospital base, this is not nineteen forty-one. . . ."

Gubenkov was known for his passion for arithmetic. Somewhere he had read and jotted down in his notebook the most astonishing figures—how many wheat grains can go into a litre bottle, the distance between Venus and Jupiter; and he could not tolerate approximate figures—if he heard anybody say that it was about ten kilometres to a certain town he would butt in and say: "eleven and a half." One day Minayev asked him: "By the way, how many hairs have you on your head?" Gubenkov answered imperturbably: "They haven't been counted yet, Comrade Captain."

"Why don't you go to the hospital base?" Minayev asked him angrily.

"Absolutely can't be done, Comrade Captain."

He was silent for a moment and then said:

"Our gallant Orel Division has marched one thousand four hundred and twenty-two kilometres from Stalingrad to this mudhole, if I may say so, and we've only another seven hundred and eighty to go to get to Berlin."

At one moment the Germans hastily retreated, but at another they would suddenly put up such a furious resistance that it seemed that they had decided to make a determined stand; but after a week of desperate fighting they would as suddenly retreat. Prisoners spoke of heavy casualties, of the stupidity of their officers, of the growing discontent among the men, but the Germans fought stubbornly. And Minayev, hearing an officer of the Seventh Department talking at length about the "awakening of consciousness" in the German army, laughed and said:

"Do you know what I am afraid of, Comrade Lieutenant? That we will be in Berlin before their consciousness awakens. . . . That will be awkward for you."

The Germans decided to hold on to Syeltsy; perhaps they were obliged to play for time, or else they counted on the enemy's weariness. The little town was situated on a hill from which the Germans had a view of the whole plain.

General Zykov was flustered; every now and again the Army Commander telephoned and, without any greeting, demanded: "What about Syeltsy?..." The task of capturing the town was assigned to Osip. He took a fancy to the right slope of the hill: it was dry, and it would be

possible to haul guns up. To the left of the hill there was a bog overgrown with scrub. To this place Minayev was sent to divert the attention of the Germans from the direction of the main blow. In the morning, three battalions launched an attack on the approaches to the town. The Germans had expected an attack on the right, for they were convinced that this was the only direction through which it was possible to pass. As soon as our infantry rose to their feet a curtain of fire came down in front of them; four times they attempted to rush the hill, and four times they reeled back. Meanwhile, Minayev's battalion lay low in the bog. The men were invisible owing to the thick scrub, and the Germans calculated that there was no more than a company there. At about mid-day Minayev realized that Leonidze and Polishchuk were in hard straits. He had no communication with Osip. Should he send a messenger? He would lose three or four hours if he did. So he decided: It's time we made a move. . . . The men looked like monsters—they were covered from head to foot with red, sticky mud. Minayev crawled up the steep, slippery slope together with his men. An hour later, fighting commenced inside the town.

General Zykov was in Osip's C.P. As soon as the rifle fire died down he walked into Syeltsy—his jeep was stranded in the mud. On setting eyes on Minayev he could not help laughing. Minayev was frightful to look at: red face, mud on his tunic, dried by now, and looking like the cracked skin of a hippopotamus. Zykov extended his hand. Minayev exclaimed:

"Sorry, Comrade General, mine are not hands, they are cabbage patches. . . ."

But the General clutched his muddy hand and shouted:

"Do you realize that you have captured this damned Syeltsy? . . . Last night the Army Commander telephoned me and said: 'Those who distinguish themselves I'll recommend for decoration, but if you don't capture it.' . . ."

A month later they celebrated the event: Minayev was awarded the Order of Lenin. The world was filled with the fragrance of budding flowers, petals fluttered like snowflakes. They had supper in the open air. Before that there had been a few quiet days—artillery and ammunition were brought up: they were preparing for the summer. Everybody was in high spirits, glad of the decoration that had been awarded their comrade, of the fine evening, and of the imminence of the climax. Looking at Minayev, Osip recalled the mound in the steppe. I didn't think then that we would be sitting somewhere near Poland, supping and laughing. . . . Only few of those have survived. . . .

Some bottles of French wine were brought up—they had been captured from the Germans. Minayev took a sip and said:

"The impression is flattering, but superficial. . . ."

Polishchuk declined the wine and asked for vodka.

"This kvas* is not for us..."

Osip and Leonidze said they liked the wine. Sharikov declined to take anything, but at last he said:

"I don't drink as a rule, but on an occasion like this..."

And he took up a tumbler full of vodka and drained it at a gulp.

Osip, Minayev, Leonidze, Polishchuk, Sharikov, Olya and editor Chaly... They all knew each other and got on well together; they had a few drinks and fell to dreaming. They talked about what was going to happen after the war, and life in the future seemed to them to be as bright as that April evening. Polishchuk saw himself return to the work he loved—he had been a teacher of mathematics in Nyezhin. Chaly mused: how nice it would be, after the war, to write a big book—a novel, or memoirs. He was only afraid that he lacked the talent, and besides, others would forestall him; but just now he was confident that he would write it beautifully, and that people who read it would laugh and cry. Leonidze was longing for his young wife, the lights of Tbilisi which gleamed down below like fireflies, and for books—when the war broke out he was in the second term at his university.

Minayev said:

"I can imagine how glad Mum will be. But she is so stern. She will write to me and say: 'Don't get stuck up, now. True, you climbed the hill, but it is much easier to roll down.'..."

He pictured to himself how he would embrace his mother and introduce Olyenka to her, and how Mum would say "now for the grandchildren..."

In civil life Sharikov was an engineer and had loved his work; but now, for some reason, he pictured himself on the first morning after the war not amidst the clatter of machinery, but on the riverside, when it is very quiet and you can hear the rustle of the reeds and the buzzing of flies. He had never read poetry, but now the most poetical thoughts entered his mind: how nice it would be to listen to the silence, he could listen to it for a week without tearing himself away...

Osip smiled benignly, joked, and allowed his thoughts to run from Polishchuk's school to Mum's tears. He had no dreams of his own. A month had passed since he had received the letter from Raya's regimental commander informing him that she had been killed. He had not told anybody about it, not even Minayev, he wanted to tell him, but could not—the words had stuck in his throat. He lost Raya just when he had found her, when he, for the first time, realized what she had been in his life. He did not even know whether she had received the letter he had written her after the capture of Kiev. They were to have met, to have told each other the most important things, but death intervened. When he was

* A Russian soft drink.—Tr.

alone, Osip would gaze at the photograph Raya had sent him from Rzhev. "For you I am the same as ever—Kiev Raya."... Sometimes he began to think that the grief that had afflicted him was a punishment. He had not understood what happiness was, had never seen the true Raya, had been so hard. Even his mother had been a little afraid of him.... But this is war—Raya died like a soldier, the Major wrote "she fought heroically."... And the war is a prolonged one—it began before the war, and so he had had no time.... Only now did he understand his own heart. Perhaps it was precisely because he had not enjoyed life before the war that last summer, when they were advancing westward, he had longed so much for happiness, for human warmth, for Raya.... And now he had nothing—the sands of Bahby Yar, a grave near Smolensk.... He now expended all his affection upon his comrades. The regiment was his family. It seemed to him that Minayev's Mum looked like Hannah, and when Olya blushed when Minayev teased her, she reminded him of Raya. When the war ends, this will end.... But Osip dreamed of the end no less ardently than the others—melancholy, weariness, the hopes of others demanded: if only it would end soon!...

"I think this summer will be the last," remarked Sharikov.

"The last but one," answered Polishchuk (he was convinced that it would all be over by the winter, but he did not want to say so for superstitious reasons).

Suddenly Osip laughed:

"Do you remember, Mitya, when you believed that the second front had opened? That was a rotten time. The steppe.... We were scooting...."

"I believed in promises," answered Minayev. "I thought they really were gentlemen.... Now, of course, they will open it, it will be dangerous for them not to—they may miss the bus. As Mum says: 'It's like bringing the mustard when supper is over.'..."

"With or without them, we will finish it soon," said Osip. "That's worth drinking to. Those who want our native stuff can have it—I'll have some of this 'kvas.'..."

Next morning Osip was strolling through a village; near a hut he saw Sergeant Nikitenko talking to a good-looking young woman. Osip smiled:

"Have you made an acquaintance?"

"Oh no, Comrade Major!... I have found my wife—just before the war she went to visit her sister with our daughter. She couldn't believe her own eyes. I called her by her name, but she stood staring at me as if I had come from the other world...."

The woman gazed at the Sergeant with burning eyes and tears glistened on her eyelashes. She said:

"Come into the house, Comrade Major, and see my daughter."

The little girl was five years old. She was playing with some empty cartridges. Osip took her up in his arms and danced round with her as he used to with Alya. He began to tell her a nursery tale, but got it mixed up, he had forgotten it, but the child listened to him with lips parted as if she were enchanted. Then she fingered the decorations on his breast, smiled and twittered:

"This is the sun. . . . This is a star. . . ."

He walked down the hot, dusty village street alone and smiled: he was conscious of happiness as he had never been before; and perhaps because it was the happiness of others that his smile was brighter, and his mild, kindly eyes clearer.

That evening the General told him:

"We are being transferred to the Third Byelorussian Front. Now we'll strike them such a blow that they will never recover. . . ."

* 25 *

In the spring this forest, like all the forests in France, revived as it had never done before; not only the voices of the cuckoos, and the peeping and twittering of other birds in a hundred different keys, but human voices filled the forest. Every day hundreds and thousands of new men came to join the heroes who had come here during the dark, stern years. In the towns it was already hot, as in summer, there were frequent thunderstorms, people talked to each other in whispers about the imminent landing, and about the reprisals the Germans would take against the civilian population. Small leaflets posted on the walls looked like mobilization orders. And along the tracks that led to the maquis streamed workers and shopkeepers, doctors and land surveyors, vinegrowers and students.

In April the unit of which Dédé was in command made preparations for decisive action; orders had been received from Headquarters that as soon as the signal was given that the landing had started, everything was to be done to paralyze the German transport system. Dédé and Bear had marked out about thirty of the most vulnerable points. After weighing up everything, Voronov said: "It will take the Fritzes more than a week to repair all this."

All through May the partisans waged an offensive, in Limousine they liberated a hundred inhabited places. The one drawback was still the shortage of arms.

Nicole came back with news, good and bad:

"The landing is to take place within a few days. Gustave gave me the agreed signal. It will be given by radio from London. Our task is to prevent the transfer of troops. As regards arms—the situation is bad. Gustave told me that it's the same everywhere. The Military Committee has issued an appeal to the people in which it openly says that the Lon-

donors refuse to supply arms to the partisans. Gustave thinks that the top ranks are to blame. . . . Charley, the representative of the American Intelligence, told Vauban: 'We'll supply you, but not the F.T.P.—there are too many Communists among them.' . . ."

Dédé laughed:

"I know Vauban, he is a college teacher, a Socialist. It's all clear, more or less. Obviously, the Boches are living their last days, otherwise those gentlemen would not be so candid. . . . Be that as it may, we must do everything in our power. The A.S. will not save them, even if the Americans supply them with a hundred tanks. . . ."

Mado remembered that evening well. While Dédé was talking to Bear, she was sitting in a small glade eating the first wild strawberries, pale and sour. Bear came up to her. They had been friends for a long time. Bear now spoke French fluently. Mado often questioned him about Russia and he answered her with fervour, feeling that she was drinking in every word. Perhaps it was because the climax was approaching that he recalled the most difficult time—the summer of nineteen forty-two, the Don, his talk with Sergei—about where they would erect bridges when they came back. . . . He had told France about the retreat on many occasions previous to this, but this was the first time he mentioned Sergei. he called him "Captain Vlahov." Mado repressed a cry; she merely enquired:

"What is his first name?"

"Sergei."

In her agitation she plucked the grass.

"What does he look like?"

Voronov burst out laughing:

"I can't answer that one. It's a woman's question. . . . Good-looking, tall, fair. . . . Why do you ask? . . ."

"Wait. . . . First tell me—is it the one I mean or not? When he is agitated he throws his head back and looks like this—can you see? . . ."

"That's it. So you know him. That's strange! . . ."

"There's nothing strange about it. He was in Paris, and we met there. . . ."

"He was enthusiastic about Paris, he liked the city."

"What is he like now? Has he aged?"

"You are funny, France. How can I answer that? I didn't know him before the war. He is young, younger than I am. He has a wife, he told me that, but no children. . . . He is an excellent commander and a good comrade. . . ."

Bear never did understand why Mado became unusually merry, laughed, larked about, pinned a daisy to his forage cap and said:

"Bear with flower! . . ."

Dédé called him: they drove to Arthur's group; its assignment was to blow up a railway bridge.

Mado continued to smile. A miracle, a real miracle! I had a feeling that he was alive. . . . (It did not occur to her that he might have been killed after Bear had parted from him, that there had been the battle of Stalingrad, the Kursk salient, and the offensive. No. It seemed to her that it was only yesterday that he had sent her a telegram.) She thought about him with a tender smile on her lips. He was living a different life from hers. He is far, very far away. But how near, and dear, he was. Nearer than when they were sitting on the bench under the chestnut tree. . . . She felt neither jealousy nor pain at the words "he is married." For a moment she mused: what kind of a wife has he got? She must be a good woman. . . . But at once her thoughts reverted to Sergei. In those bitter times when he was marching across the steppe with Bear he remembered Paris. And she, Mado, had become for him part of the distant city—like an ancient street in the cité, or like the merry-go-round at a fair, or like the urchins who float toy ships in the Luxemburg gardens. It is amazing how impotent time is! And space too. . . . We were separated, we shall probably never meet again, and I don't know whether we ought to meet, probably not, but I have met him now, I am embracing him, leading him through the forest and saying: these are not chestnut trees, they are oaks, and it is not the same summer, and not the same Mado. My name is France. I have not seen brushes and an easel for a long time. I handle a gun. They say I am a good fighter. . . . But all this is unimportant. I am Mado. And it does not matter that I was an artist then. What matters is that we have met, that we have discovered each other. That is something bigger than discovering a star, or an island. What has been cannot be wiped out, Sergei. You saved me. Perhaps it was not you—you went away. It was my love for you, but that is just the same. . . . You brought me to this forest. . . . I will never renounce this, it is a miracle, just as it was a miracle that Bear suddenly mentioned you; he might not have done so, he didn't for six months. He might have come in contact with a different unit. . . . A miracle! It is a miracle that you exist, darling! And the daisies are yours, all the daisies. I no longer tell my fortune, I know it. Speaking crudely, from the mundane point of view, there will be no happiness for me, but actually I have known happiness, I know it now, and always will know it, the biggest, bitterest, hardest, purest. . . . Sergei! . . .

Dédé and Bear returned when dusk was already falling. The girl radio operator was waiting for Dédé:

"I have received a message: 'In the green garden there is a tall tree.' . . ."

Dédé said:

"Signal all points—blow up railway tracks and bridges. Send first signal to Arthur. Order everybody to stand by. . . ."

He dropped down on the grass and said to Bear:

"They will land tomorrow. . . . And high time. . . ."

Everybody in the unit was aware that the "to arms" signal had been given. Mado smiled: a day of miracles! What is the date today! The fifth, I think, I must remember it. . . .

Miki was sent to operate with Arthur's group. On his way, through the black forest, he sang:

*We fain would stay with thee,
But such is fate's decree,
That we unto our death must go
Before the first cock's crow.
Others will greet the sun,
And laugh and drink and sing.
And perhaps forget the thing,
That we too loved life and fun. . . .*

From below, out of the valley, which was still enveloped in the mist of the early dawn, came a low rumble like the sound of distant thunder: the bridge on the Toulouse-Paris line was blown sky-high.

In the morning Arthur arrived. His group had been surrounded by Germans. He was the only one to escape.

"Miki shot three. Then he was killed. . . . But the bridge is gone."

PART SIX

* 1 *

HANS SCHIRKE was sipping bitter-sweet vermouth on the terrace of a Montauban café when Unterscharführer Seidel came running up.

"It has started," he shouted. "You can say good-bye to this country life, they are sending us to Cherbourg."

Hans Schirke had spent nearly eighteen months in France; in the beginning it had indeed been country life—he had strolled under the arcades of La Rochelle, had bathed in the sea, and consumed lots of grapes, sea food and cognac. He became sunburned and more manly; he wrote to his father that he was "ready to enter into a duel with fate." This idyllic life was marred by an unpleasant incident. One night Hans was strolling down a dark side-street and saw a young woman. He turned his flashlight on her and saw that she was good-looking. He said to her: "Mademoiselle, permit me to escort you. It is unsafe for a young woman to walk alone at this time of night." With that he gently took her arm. She tore her arm away and ran off shrieking. People came running out, heaven knows where from. Hans pushed them all aside and proceeded on his way. Another young woman approached him and said: "Don't bother about that ninny, you are too good for her." Again Hans turned on his flashlight and saw that this girl was prettier than the first. The girl took him to her home. It was a wretched hovel, but he paid no attention to the surroundings, he was enchanted by the girl's charms. On leaving he wanted to pay her, but she refused to take the money. "I would like to give you a present," she said. He laughed: "What present can you give me? The kingdom of France, perhaps?" Later on he roamed through the narrow streets of the old town for a long time searching for this slut; she had given him a fine present indeed—he spent a whole month in hospital! Soon after that the "Führer" Regiment was despatched to the mountainous district of Dordogne, where bands of terrorists had appeared. On Christmas Eve Walter was killed, and Hans vowed to take vengeance on the "Froggies," as he called the French people. He forced his way into a house, shot all the inmates and left a wailing infant lying

among the dead bodies—let the brat squeal, nobody will look in here for a long time. . . .

All through the winter and the spring the S.S. regiment was engaged in fighting the partisans. Nice country life, to be sure! . . . But it will be hotter in Normandy, of course. Here, at least, one could sit in a café, have a drink and a good laugh.

Obersturmführer Schwabe thought they would arrive in Limoges in the evening of the day they left, but they lost two days—the terrorists had got completely out of hand: near Cressensac, they attacked a column and a regular battle took place. At Groleyrac they found that the bridge had been blown up. The third delay occurred in Rouffignac—about a hundred S.S. men were killed or wounded. Hans recalled the letters he had received from his father. Yes, it was understandable in Russia—the people there are accustomed to live in the forests like savages. But these “Froggies” are only capable of manufacturing perfumes and running restaurants. What has made them so daring? . . . Unterscharführer Seidel said in harmony with these reflections:

“I have been in Serbia. Every man is a bandit there. We knew that, so when we got there, we burned down all the villages. I have also been in Russia, near Leningrad. There, a girl killed two of our men. We hanged her head downwards. We burned villages there, together with the people—we said: we’ll leave no houses, no bugs, and no children either. . . . Here, we have ourselves to blame, we’ve been mollicoddling these people for four years. In Toulouse I hit one of those bitches, and I was given a spell in the guardroom for it. Now we have the result. . . . No, we’ve got to handle these people differently. In Tulle, our people hanged a hundred and fifty of these Frenchies, and it was the right thing to do. If we want to hurl those Americans back, we’ve got to have a safe rear.”

Next morning they were fired at again, and Unterscharführer Seidel, who had taken part in the Balkan and Russian campaigns, was mortally wounded. Everybody was down in the dumps. Obersturmführer Schwabe said he would go and talk to the chief: drastic measures had to be taken. It was no use chasing the terrorists in the forest, that was only a waste of men and time. . . .

It was a fine summer day. The small town of Oradour-sur-Glane seemed to be immersed in profound peace. Green meadows spread all round the town and piebald cows, with a serenity imbibed from the ages, buried their nozzles in the emerald verdure. Patient anglers sat on the bank of the little river Glane. Willows leaned over the water, and the poplar trees stood in reverie, like lonely dreamers. This town was an oasis—around it there were neither forests harbouring partisans, nor factories likely to attract bombers. It was a haven for refugees from Paris, from distant Lorraine and from Bordeaux; Spanish families who had fled from their homeland after the Republic was crushed had found

work there. Local inhabitants sheltered a few Jews—Sarah Yakubovich from Kalisz, a barber from Budapest named Kanzler, and Marguerite Simon from Paris, found refuge here from the furnaces of Oświęcim. Notwithstanding the fact that heavy fighting had been going on in Normandy for five days, the people here kept calm. It was Saturday, and the slight animation visible in the town had nothing to do with the war situation: there was to be a medical inspection in the schools; it had been announced that tobacco would be issued on the June ration cards, so the peasants from the surrounding villages had flocked into town; and the inhabitants of Limoges arrived to spend the week end in the fresh air and at the same time get hold of a pound of butter or a few vegetables.

It was lunch time. Madame Avril, the old landlady of the inn, whispered to her lodgers, among whom was a woman from Paris with her children, a retired army vet from Reims and a townhall clerk: "I have duck and turnips today." . . . The vet communicated the latest news: "The landing forces have not been thrown back. . . ." Two young school-teachers, who had been sent here for practical training, had their meals at the Hotel Milord; afraid that they would be late for school, they hurried off without finishing their lunch. At the Globe café some old peasants were sipping sour wine and saying: "There's a rumour that the partisans have blocked up the tunnel." . . .

The church clock showed the hour of ten minutes after two. The belfry, like all the belfries in France, was crowned by a weathercock. Light clouds floated across the sky. Barber Brouillard was lathering the cheeks of a red-faced farmer. Apothecary Pascaud was explaining to an old woman that the medicine prescribed for her was to be taken after and not before meals. Mademoiselle Couturier, the young typist from Limoges, forgot that she had come to get some butter and was sitting under a tree, dreaming of happiness. In the school the children were chirping with excitement after their playtime and Madame Rousseau said: "Be quiet, children, you have not yet learned your percentages." . . . Montazeaud, the notary, was reading a newspaper. Dr. Desourteaux, after examining the newborn infant, mumbled: "He's all right! . . ." It was then that the first German car arrived; one of the passengers was Hans Schirke. He read the inscription on the signpost: "Oradour-sur-Glane" and thought to himself: too long a name for a small town like this. . . . He yawned: We are dead tired after the past four days, and instead of getting a rest we are to go to Normandy. . . .

The Germans ordered all the inhabitants to gather in the market place. An old man said to Hans:

"I am an invalid, I can't get up. I have been bedridden for three years. . . ."

Hans burst out laughing and said:

"Then think I am a doctor."

With that he dragged the old man out of the bed and crushed his skull with the butt of his revolver.

The market place was crammed. Women pressed their children to their breasts. Children wailed. Several aged men and women came hobbling to the square, supported by their grandchildren. Here was the cobbler Souviat, the seamstress Zeller, the girl student Rouzseau, Renaudin the blacksmith, Reynaud the baker, Mercier the glovemaker, Leblanc the weaver, Lesparat the wheelwright, Lorch the priest, the carpenter Dautre, Doire the navvy, Ito the chimney sweep, Giachino the turner, Buisson the pastrycook, Couty the schoolteacher, Bichaud the tailor, Buicière the postman, Poussat the miller, Lachaud the mason, Beaubreuil the mechanic, Poutraud the chauffeur, nurse Hebras, Jouhaud the packer, Tessaud the accountant, Barthélemy the housepainter, Tessaud the French polisher; here were the Thomases, a peasant family, fourteen in all. The whole population of Oradour was here. The children from the two schools also came; they laughed and romped—the Germans had told them that everybody would be photographed in the market place. But on seeing the vicious faces of the Germans, the children quietened down.

Meanwhile the Germans placed a cordon round the town; they scoured the surrounding fields to see whether anybody was hiding in the grass. The clock showed the hour of three. All the inhabitants had been rounded up. The S.S. men separated the women and children from the men and drove them into the church. The men were taken to sheds and garages in small groups. Then the Germans set to work; they set fire to the sheds and garages. All those who attempted to escape from the burning buildings were killed. The women and children were locked up in the church. The church was surrounded by S.S. men with machine guns. When they set fire to the church a frantic woman threw her child out of a narrow window. Schirke was on the alert: he picked up the child and hurled it back into the flames.

After finishing with the people the Germans began to ransack the houses: they found valuables, silk, crates of wine, silver cutlery, and provisions; all this they loaded on to their trucks. After that they drenched the houses with petrol and set fire to the town. Rotenführer Klotz said:

"The houses burned better in Russia, there's a lot of wood in them. . . ."

Obersturmführer Schwabe looked at his watch:

"Five minutes to ten. We arrived here at two. Eight hours. That's not much. After all, it was a whole town. . . ."

Oradour-sur-Glane was wiped off the map. Eighteen inhabitants succeeded in getting away. All the rest perished.

The wine they took out of Oradour the Germans drank up in the neighbouring villages; they laughed and sang soldiers' songs and the peasants thought they were celebrating victory over the Allies. Hans

Schirke felt a sense of relief: at last he had settled accounts with the "Froggies"! Recalling how the woman had shrieked when he threw her child into the flames, he smiled: that pays them out for Walter, for the blown-up bridge, for all the torments I have gone through. . . .

Next day Hans wrote a letter to his father. This is what he wrote:

"DEAR FATHER,

"All the time I have been out here I have felt that you are near me, but during the past few days this feeling has been particularly strong. The terrorists are trying to stab us in the back, but they are not succeeding. Yesterday, we destroyed a real hornets' nest. You may set your mind at rest, your son will never falter and will never give way to despondency. I have received two letters from Mama. Naturally, she is worried about me and you. I am impatiently waiting for news about the war in the East; I have the impression that you have succeeded in checking the Reds all along the line. I kiss you heartily. Heil Hitler!

Your son,

Hans."

The name of the old invalid that Hans Schirke killed was Armand Clavaud; he was eighty-two years old, and he remembered the Franco-Prussian war. The child that Hans Schirke threw into the flames, was Michelle Aliotti, she was not yet two months old, she was born on the fourteenth of April.

The "Führer" Regiment moved on to Poitiers. Hans Schirke sang his favourite song:

*I saw a common violet
By the roadside grow.
I was loth to pluck it,
And I was loth to go. . . .*

The road wound through an oak wood. Suddenly machine guns rattled; evidently there were terrorists on the summit of the hill. The S.S. men halted and opened artillery fire. Obersturmführer Schwabe said: "Unheard of insolence, but I think. . . ."

But nobody learned what he thought: a shell burst in the road and the Obersturmführer was killed by a splinter. The partisans were now firing with a German anti-tank gun. The battle lasted four hours. After that the S.S. men turned back to Eymoutiers; night was approaching and it was unwise to go through the wood.

They loaded the dead on a truck; they did so hurriedly, and Hans Schirke's head hung over the edge; his lips were parted; when the truck bumped over pitfalls Hans Schirke's head wagged, and it looked as though he was angry and was swearing at somebody.

Dédé said:

"It turned out not so bad. What do you think, Bear?"

Voronov laughed:

"Not at all bad. If they get the same welcome everywhere, they may be too late for the show...."

Voronov was thinking of Jose the mason who was killed in that battle. The day before he had asked Voronov: "Tell me, Bear. Will I see my Barcelona again?..." And Voronov went on thinking: Perhaps, when I get back to Leningrad I'll not find any of my old friends.... Perhaps I'll not get back.... The wind rose; and all night long the oak trees rustled, rustled solemnly, as if they knew what men and women were feeling, as if these ancient trees knew that men and women had no words, nor could have words, for these feelings.

* 2 *

"You are too logical," Léo had said to Osip when they met in Kiev and were arguing about happiness. Osip had then expressed surprise: "How can one be too logical?" Since childhood he had striven for clarity; perhaps that was why he had found it so hard to master the science of the heart in which, instead of theorems, you had puzzles, and where exceptions refuted the rule. Even during the war he had striven for precision, for order ("accuracy," as Minayev said chaffingly). The regular officers had arrived at the front with definite ideas about military operations; at first they were bewildered by the discrepancy between what they had learned at the military schools and academies and what they actually encountered. When Osip commenced active service he had a very vague idea about military affairs; the chaos of the first few months had seemed natural to him. He learned to fight while fighting; like every self-taught man, he was conscious of a double feeling—he was proud of what he had acquired with such great effort, and he stood in awe of science. He admired the skill and the daring plans of the Army Command and would say to himself: this bears the impress of Stalin.... But only a year ago, fortuity, an unforeseen trifle, had still often hindered the execution of a plan of operation. Now, the execution was worthy of the plan.

Osip had never seen artillery preparation like this before. He laughed: the newspapers reported that the Germans had invented a flying bomb—they were dropping them on London. True to themselves—they were striving after psychological effect, as if the whole world were a nervous young lady ready to swoon. Our artillery is more accurate: it knows where the shells will drop.... Osip gazed enraptured at the ploughed-up gun emplacements. Clean work! Every shell saved the lives of lots of our men. That is why it is easy to advance....

They marched through forest and bog, marched thirty and forty kilometres a day; their high spirits helped them to overcome weariness. Every man knew that it was necessary to cut the Germans' line of retreat. The tanks went ahead. There was a great number of them. As they drove past, the tankmen jested and laughed. And the men thought to themselves: now the Fritzes will see what it's like to have tanks in front and tanks behind. . . . General Zykov said to Osip, laughing:

"I asked for aircraft and Syomushkin answered: 'We can't keep up with the infantry—the aerodromes are lagging behind.' . . ."

But General Syomushkin was too modest: the Air Force was doing magnificent work. During the first days of the battle the "Ils" destroyed the enemy's radio stations. The Germans were deprived of means of communication and twelve divisions were converted into a mass of bewildered officers and men who wandered around in the forest in a vain search for a loophole.

They marched forward without caring about the fate of the Germans who had remained in their rear. Consciousness of their strength had transformed the men—when they dropped from weariness they leapt to their feet again forthwith; they talked louder, their motions became more vigorous.

A prisoner of war, a captain, said to Osip:

"I started the war here—near Minsk. At that time we pushed forward as if you were not here at all. But now, something awful is happening—you are pushing forward, completely ignoring us. It will be true to say that we have exchanged roles."

Osip grinned:

"Our roles are different. You came here as conquerors, we are liberators. Even when we invade your country we shall be liberators—we will liberate those who are subjected to you, and we will liberate you from your own stupidity."

The men called the surrounded Germans "roaming Fritzes." They roamed in entire divisions, with tanks and artillery, and they roamed in small groups. Some of the officers changed into civvies. It was said that a German general was wandering in the forest with a trench mortar, that some Fritzes, driven mad by hunger, had raided a bread factory near Minsk, that the editor of an army newspaper had suddenly caught sight of Germans armed with machine guns outside the editorial office and that by the united efforts of the entire staff, including the poet, the proof-reader and the compositors, the Germans were repulsed. Prisoners were brought in by service truck drivers, by peasant women, and even by children; twelve-year-old Alyosha Sverchuk brought in a dozen perspiring, footsore Germans. One of the prisoners related that they had not known where the fighting line was—they thought that they had only to cross the road and they would be in their own lines; but when they peeped out of the forest they could not believe their eyes—a train was

running with a Russian driver on the engine. True to German custom, this German kept a diary. This is one of his last entries: "The Russians are now restoring the railways faster than we are retreating."

Chaly, the editor of the divisional newspaper, had procured some German newsprint, typewriter ribbons and a bottle of cognac. He wrote an article saying: "This time we are not pushing the enemy out, we are wiping him out." Then he thought: this is too profound, perhaps. I had better send it to one of the central newspapers as from their "own correspondent." He composed a humorous rhymed review, which he signed: "Brainy Anton." In it he wrote: "I tell you, boys. I'm all aflutter. No doubt you'll ask me: what's the matter? We've got the Germans in such a hole, they'll never get out of Byelorussia."...

In Minsk there was such a profusion of flowers and tears of joy that Osip was utterly bewildered. Perhaps it was because he had learned the language of the heart too late that he had become so sensitive to everything; and when a little girl with a skimpy plait pushed a posy of cornflowers into his hand and blurted out hurriedly "greetings to the Red Army" (she could not pronounce her "r's"), he bit his lip, wanted to kiss her, but instead waved his hand in resignation and marched on.

The roar of an explosion was heard. Osip looked down the street and saw the far end of it blotted out by dense smoke. In this too the Germans remained true to their habits: they had abandoned the hospital with their wounded, but they had not forgotten to mine the new houses. Glancing at the ruins, the men swore; the enemy did not allow their rage to subside even for an hour.

Two days later Osip saw Minsk again—his unit was turned back to the Moghilev highroad: a large group of surrounded Germans were trying to break through to the West. The city presented a depressing sight—shortly before that the Germans had bombed the surviving blocks of houses. The dead body of a little girl was extricated from the debris: "I wonder if it is the little girl who gave me the flowers?" thought Osip. "The vipers! They are expiring, and yet they sting!..."

It was a sultry day. They found themselves at a spot that was well known to the people of Minsk. The soldiers did not know what "Tros-tyanets" meant; they only saw what a man could scarcely have seen even if he had been in the war for three years, even if he had seen his comrades die, Stalingrad, even if on the previous day he had seen Tolochin, that jumble of mutilated bodies, twisted iron, torn-off limbs and shattered guns.... On a piece of waste ground lay dead bodies piled up like stacks of wood; the Germans who built the stacks followed a definite order—tall bodies, medium bodies, short bodies—children's bodies were stacked at the end of each row. The bodies were charred: the Germans had set fire to them and had hurried away. Next to this waste plot was a field of charred bones. Every day hermetically sealed vans came here

from Minsk—on the way the people imprisoned in them were asphyxiated by gas. The bottom of the van dropped, the dead slipped to the ground, the Germans stacked the bodies and incinerated them. This had gone on for two years. . . . And when the men set eyes on Trostyanets, it became so quiet that a cuckoo was heard in the neighbouring forest. Corporal Kudrevatikh, a man of calm disposition, no longer young, stood next to Osip wiping the tears from his eyes with his sleeve.

An hour later, the Germans who had occupied the forest opened fire; their aim was to pass through Trostyanets. Suddenly, Corporal Kudrevatikh shouted:

"What are you standing here for, boys! . . . Now, then, Bolsheviks! . . ."

By the evening it was all over. For a moment war assumed its original primitiveness: there was neither strategy nor calculation—just rage, fighting and death.

Under the hot sun the dead Germans soon turned black, shrivelled and filled the air with their stench.

The men spent the night in the forest. It was cool just before day-break, even cold. Osip slept for three hours: he traced the route of the forthcoming march on the map and then went up to Minayev. The latter was awake; he was squatting on his haunches looking closely at something.

"What have you found?" Osip asked him.

Minayev looked sheepish: "Nothing. . . . Time to be moving? . . ."

It was an early summer morning, when the trees, not yet having known the exhausting passion of August, are clothed in their bright green raiment and whisper to each other about their arboreal affairs, and when that whispering sounds like a secret conference. Above them hung the bright, very distant sky, and at their roots teemed beetles, bugs and butterflies. And only the restless birds, fluttering amidst the dense foliage, joined in this wise whispering of the trees, some with a tender twitter, some with a shrewish screech.

Osip stretched himself and said:

"We are being diverted to the north—to the Niemen. If things continue like this we shall soon be at the frontier. . . . Do you remember what you said in nineteen forty-two—when the war ends, you'll write a novel. There was nothing to write about then—we were stuck in one spot while they were hammering at us. Now you've got plenty of material—every day provides you enough for a chapter. . . ."

Minayev smiled:

"No, Osip, the novel is finished—it was finished on that mound. A lot is happening now, that's true. We take a town every day. Yesterday Leonidze captured a general; he was quite tame. Leonidze offered him a Kazbek; he took it and burst into tears. I caught some Italians; they said they had been on the Dodécanèse and didn't want to fight any

more, so the Germans dragged them to Minsk to dig trenches. All very exotic, not counting the fact that near Berezina I caught a little Frenchman from the Legion—this is not eighteen hundred and twelve, mind you—I thought he was Marshal Ney, but he turned out to be a restaurant owner, 'Fleur de Lis' he called it. 'Come and visit me and I'll give you a good meal,' he said. You see how absurd it all is! . . ."

"But why doesn't it make good stuff for a novel?"

Minayev looked thoughtful:

"I don't know how to explain it to you. . . . Everything was decided on that little mound. There the action was internal: who had the most stamina—we or they? . . . What is taking place now is a classical operation; it will be studied at all the military academies. Sentence has already been passed, it has only to be carried out. We will do that, that's clear. . . . I often think now about what's going to be after our victory. Perhaps this is premature, the Fritzes are still fighting like hell, and I am not by any means certain that I will live to see victory—it is a matter of luck. . . . But for all that, I do think about it—how we will live, rebuild the towns, what changes will take place, how everything will turn out in the world and at home. . . . Look at this anthill. . . . Accidentally, I disturbed it a bit—I was looking at it when you came up—it's amazing how they all set to work at once—hauling twigs, toiling, rushing hither and thither, all very worried, the little devils! . . . Perhaps I won't write a novel about the war, but if I live another thirty or forty years I'll certainly write a most interesting novel. . . ."

"What about?"

"About nothing. About ordinary life. . . ."

He got up, brushed the dust off his clothes and said:

"So we are going to the Niemen! Exotics! Today, we shall probably liberate an Australian who fought in the Solomon Islands. I shall agree to nothing less."

* 3 *

Schirke had often thought of those forests, but had never pictured to himself what they were like inside. He was depressed by their depth and silence: it was like diving into the sea. He knew only the German forests, tidy, cosy, with well-kept paths, green benches and signposts—flowery glades and hunting boxes. Those forests were the continuation of the well-ordered life that he was familiar with. But this was chaos. . . . Now he knew where people like "Ivan" came from; the Russians may talk about books as much as they like, but they are primitive creatures all the same, their strength lies in their proximity to nature.

On the first day, notwithstanding the tragic situation he was in, Schirke admired the forest, compared it with Gothic cathedrals, and called to mind the poetry of the romanticists. All his life, Schirke had

been torn by two passions: the desire to organize, love of order, and contempt for the common herd, the cult of solitude. "Great Germany" had been as much an abstraction to him as this forest, until he found himself in it. He detested the people, he was of the opinion that, with rare exceptions, they were petty and stupid, and, in addition, they stank (he had always felt nausea at public meetings). He could understand why the Führer had built himself a house in Berchtesgaden, among the mountains. . . . This forest seemed to him to have emerged from the darkness of time; it was in forests like these that the Teutons roamed when there were as yet no hucksters, no silly theories about equality, no shortsighted science.

When night fell he felt frightened. He was not a coward. But it was one thing to see the enemy before you; to find oneself in a strange element, was another. The night was exceptionally dark in the depth of the forest; the intense silence seemed deceptive—the crack of a twig, or the cry of a night bird, caused his heart to palpitate. A partisan might be lurking behind every tree. Schirke knew, if anybody did, that there were numbers of them in the forest; it was from here that they had made their raid upon the town. . . .

Schirke had about thirty men with him—four from the Kommandatur, and the rest from combatant units. Major Schirke was the senior among them. He tried to cheer up the others and assured them that they would soon make their way to the German lines; but on that very first night he realized that he would be killed. This thought did not frighten him. He mentally appealed to the oaks that had once rustled over the heads of the knights of old and recalled the poems of Uhland. But suddenly his face grew pale with horror—he thought he saw a bandit rise before him, it was Lieutenant Werner. Fortunately, in the darkness, nobody had seen the fright the Major had felt.

Everything had happened with such incredible speed. Was it so long ago that he had condescendingly assured the Burgomaster that the Allies were being held on the Normandy coast, that the Reds were gloating over this and would not go to their assistance, not for anything? . . . They had scarcely managed to escape from the city. He was told that a regular disaster had occurred on the road between Minsk and Rakov—the Reds' tanks had destroyed a German column. . . . All this is inexplicable, said Schirke to himself, or, perhaps, too explicable. . . . The Führer lived among the eagles and failed to see the baseness of humanity. He had not crushed the vipers in time. But humans are humans; while the Führer was leading them from victory to victory they shouted "Heil!" Now they were silent; tomorrow they will wash their hands of the whole thing. How many of those who are with me now are traitors? Yesterday, a corporal said that he had fought because he had been "forced" to do so. If he talks like that in my presence, how will he talk when the Reds have captured him? . . . Ribbentrop failed to

disunite our enemies. We started well. But later. . . I don't know where we blundered—in failing to crush the English after we had vanquished France, or in hurrying to the East? . . . And here too lots of idiotic things were done: the Kommandants thought more of their own comfort, or of sending parcels to their families, than of the Fatherland. I will not see the realization of my dream—Germany ruling the world, the Führer at the helm of the ship of mankind.

One man must dictate his will to all—this is the meaning of the present age; we have obliterated the nineteenth century. The Kaiser was obliged to reckon with the opinion of a saddler, and such like. The ballot box—what a mean spirit that represents! As if arithmetic can define Goethe's superiority to a swineherd! If there is a Führer man, there must be a Führer nation. Who can govern mankind if not we? . . . Even if we are defeated now we will achieve it—in twenty, thirty years' time. Hans will see it. . . .

Poor boy, where is he now? In Normandy, no doubt. There is heavy fighting there; the Allies want to crush us with their fighting machines. . . . He has not been trained to go through such an ordeal, his mother pampered him. But she could not help pampering him. As a child he looked like a cherub—curls, blue eyes and an innocent smile. . . .

Schirke was overcome with emotion and heaved a loud sigh. . . .

How long have they been wandering in this accursed forest? The fourth day, probably. . . . They were tormented by hunger; they had long consumed the provisions they had brought with them. They were now living on wild berries. When Schirke, on the first day, picked a bilberry, tears came to his eyes; he recalled how his mother had made bilberry pies and he would steal the berries, and his mother would say: "Show me your tongue." . . . Now he was fed up with bilberries, he longed for a chunk of hot meat. . . . Only nine of them were left, the others had scattered—cowards—they had gone to meet the Reds. The nine were: Lieutenant Walter, Sergeant Gläser and seven privates. But even these could not be relied upon: that morning the Sergeant had said: "We had better get out of the forest. Falling into the hands of the regular Russian troops won't be half as bad as meeting with bandits." . . . Schirke told him that death in one way was no better than another, but this had no effect upon the Sergeant; he stubbornly replied: "It will be better if we got out on to the road." . . . I am no longer a major to him, I am just a vagabond, like he is. He has heard a lot of talk about equality, and the idiot thinks that his skin is as precious as the life of the Führer. Diogenes was right when he searched for a man with a lantern in broad daylight. . . .

They came out on to the road, but not because Sergeant Gläser won the argument. They were following the compass; Schirke had a map, but the road they emerged on was not marked on it: it had been newly laid by partisans for the Reds' tanks.

On catching sight of the Russians, Schirke ordered the men to take cover and open fire. The Russians at once returned the fire and killed a German private; Schirke was slightly wounded in the left arm. He snatched up the dead private's tommy gun and was about to fire a burst when something inexplicable happened—he himself was unable to explain his conduct later: Lieutenant Walter put his hands up, and Schirke, as if bewitched, forthwith threw the tommy gun aside and put up his right hand too.

At the war-prisoners' mustering centre, Schirke sat apart from the rest and would not talk to anybody. His face was a picture of woe. Everybody thought it was due to the pain in his arm, but actually he was undergoing the torments of contrition: why did I put my hands up?... How could I, an old Nazi, betray the Führer at the decisive moment like a newly-fledged hanger-on?... He sat like that for several hours until suddenly the thought entered his head that he must live for the Führer's sake. If we are defeated, who will tell the young generation the story of these great years? I must live in order to tell Hans' children that we were in Paris, that we were in Russia, and will be there again.... The torch must be passed on to the next generation.... Schirke felt calmer, even cheerful. He began to think about something else: are they going to give us any food today? The Russians are savages, you can expect no good from them.... His fears proved groundless: bread and canned meat was issued to them. Schirke ate greedily and smiled.

Later he was taken to have his wound dressed. He was treated by a young surgeon. While the operation was being performed another surgeon, about fifty years of age, sat near by and gazed at Schirke with curiosity. The elderly surgeon spoke German; Schirke was both pleased and embarrassed by this: he is probably an Intelligence Officer wearing the insignia of a surgeon....

This was Dmitri Alexeyevich Krylov, who had arrived from Ivants for medical supplies—he was told that the Germans had left four cases of supplies here.

"Well, how does it feel to be a prisoner of war?" Krylov asked the Major. "Are you convinced now that we don't make pork chops out of you? You roam about in the forest making it hard for yourselves and giving us a lot of trouble. We are in a hurry to get to Germany, but we have to waste time hunting for the likes of you..."

Krylov said this in a gruff, but amiable tone. He offered the Major a cigarette, but Schirke declined the offer, although he was dying for a smoke—he had smoked his last cigarette two days before, but he felt a revulsion at accepting favours from the enemy. He answered:

"We are soldiers, and we are performing our duty. If we can hold you up even for an hour, then our behaviour is justified. You do not censure the Russian officers who were surrounded three years ago and refused to surrender, but also roamed the forests..."

Krylov exclaimed:

"That's interesting! It appears that you can think. The Germans I have seen up till now have all been colts. It will be entertaining to talk to an intelligent fascist. . . . That's so, but our men were roaming in their own land, you are here in the nature of guests, so to speak, and uninvited ones at that. That's a different thing. . . ."

"But suppose your men were surrounded in Germany, should they have surrendered? . . ."

"No. . . . You, by the way, did surrender. . . ."

"I was wounded. . . ."

"That's a feeble excuse, my dear sir. It won't go down with me. I am a surgeon. With a wound like that you could still kill others, and yourself too. But you did not shoot yourself. . . ."

Schirke made no answer: how could he explain to this Bolshevik that it was his duty to live and sustain the Führer's fire in others? . . .

Krylov continued:

"Very well, let's leave that. You surrendered. All the better. But if you are not a colt like the rest, explain to me what you are striving for. I have asked this question a hundred times and have never received a reasonable reply."

"It will be difficult for me to explain it to you because you are no doubt infected with materialism. . . . Nevertheless, I will try, otherwise you may think that I am cravenly trying to shirk the question. The oldest in the family has to perform certain duties. It is his duty to bring up the younger ones. When a father punishes his child, it would be foolish to call this violence; and a son who forbids his aged father to drink intoxicating liquors would scarcely be called a tyrant."

"Who, in your opinion, are the naughty children and who the decrepit papa?"

"The senile members of the European family are the French and the English. I lived in France for a long time, and I am ready to admit that the French have many good qualities, but they suffer from senile sclerosis. We saved them in time from dangerous whims. . . . As for the children, pardon me for saying so . . . that's you."

"Very interesting! Exceptionally silly, but interesting. And you, no doubt, are the houseowner with a skeleton key in your pocket?"

"We are a nation in the stage of maturity. The Germans are vested with a mission. Even Hegel and Fichte wrote about this. Our mission is to give Europe a new order based on the recognition of the irrational. If we fail to do that, Europe will become an infants' crèche at one end and an almshouse at the other. . . . We have come as the vehicles of culture. . . ."

"Precisely!" roared Krylov. "I looked in at Trostyanets on my way here yesterday. There you asphyxiated a hundred thousand people, you

invented the murder van, the 'Gaswagen'; obviously you are vehicles of culture. . . . So you are one of the real ones?"

Schirke shuddered and glanced at Krylov from under his brows: he must be from the P.C.I.* . . .

"I have never belonged to any party. I have just given you not my own point of view, but the Nazi's, you yourself asked me to do so. As for myself, I am a man no longer young, and I was brought up in moderate liberal views. . . ."

There was nothing to prevent him from smoking now. Krylov's cigarette case lay open in front of him. He said: "May I?" and taking a long pull, he deeply inhaled.

"Send him back," said Krylov to the young surgeon. "I talked to him because I thought he was not a colt. But do you know what he is? A gelding. And a cunning one. They are all cunning. The simpler ones shout 'Kaputt,' but this one talks about 'moderate liberal views.' He is double-dyed. . . ."

Schirke was taken away. Krylov now spoke to the young surgeon:

"Did you understand what he praised? 'Irrational basis.' Metaphysics plus whatever enters their heads. It's a frightful plan they have in view. They want to deprive the world of light. Do you know why we are trouncing them? Some say because we have more fighting machines than they. That's true, of course. But where did we get these machines from? My brother is an engineer in the Urals. He wrote and told me how hellishly hard it is there, people are almost dropping from exhaustion, but they go on working. They can't think of anything else. . . . General Ableukhov is now in command of our division. He was a goosherd when he was a boy. I went to see him one day, that was before the offensive, he was sitting reading a book. I looked, the title was 'Faust.' That's why we are trouncing them. . . . The Soviet system is not merely a change of signboards, our people are different, do you understand?"

Schirke expected that after his candid conversation with the suspicious-looking surgeon, he would be shot. That night he could not sleep: he meditated over eternity, the Führer, Hans. Next morning the young surgeon examined his wound and smiled at him affably; later they brought in breakfast. Schirke's fears vanished; he demanded that he be shaved—scandalous, haven't shaved for a week! I am a major, but I look like a tramp! . . .

He gave way to meditation again: they say the Reds are near Vilno. Perhaps we will lose the war after all. . . . But it makes no difference—Hans will see what I have dreamed of. We have been in the Caucasus, and we will be there again. . . . I should not have been so candid yesterday; one must be as wise as a serpent. I will have to hold my tongue for a year, five years. And then I will start all over again. . . .

* People's Commissariat for the Interior.—*Tr.*

An artillery captain, also a prisoner of war, came up to him. First they discussed the place they were likely to be sent to and then commented favourably on the Russian canned food; the captain was displeased with the surgeon. . . . Suddenly Schirke felt that he was more interested in the dinner he was going to get than in the fate of Vilno. . . . So he had sunk to the level of an ordinary prisoner of war, of an ordinary, stupid human! No! He must concentrate his mind on Great Germany! . . .

A sentry was standing at the gate, a fair-haired, cheerful-looking lad. He was smiling, probably because Germany was not far away and so the war would end soon, or perhaps because the morning was bright and silvery. Schirke looked viciously at the sentry: that fellow, no doubt, has a wife, or a girl, he is thinking of her, he is a peasant, or a kol-khoznik as they call them here. . . . I was able to outwit Berty, and I played with Nivelles as if he were a parrot. . . . But this fellow stands there and laughs—glad that I have been caught. . . . Can a fellow like that understand what it means to live beyond good and evil?

* 4 *

Although Sergei complained that the sappers had nothing to do—the Germans were retreating so hurriedly that they had no time to blow up the bridges—he was nevertheless in a cheerful mood; the swiftness of the advance exalted his spirits; the war was now in harmony with his temperament.

He was sitting in a hut reading a newspaper. Tanya was secretly admiring him. Even in his military uniform Sergei continued to stand out among the rest: the impulsiveness of his movements, the tender light in his seemingly absent-minded eyes which flashed for an instant and was extinguished again, his sudden smile which at times responded only to the images that vaguely passed before him, all this attracted attention. Tanya had arrived from a partisan unit that morning to establish contact with the advancing army, and although she had spent two years in the dense forest where the war had been full of unusual things, the Major of Engineers reading a newspaper looked unusual to her. Before the war she had studied literature in Minsk, and trying to grasp what it was that she liked about the Major, she told herself in a school-girl way: there is so much Soviet romanticism in him. . . .

Sergei was waiting for signals officer Pleshcheyev. The Sappers' Battalion was to be transferred to the division that was marching on Vilnius. Sergei mused: we are on the move, but all the time from south to north, I expected the Vistula, but evidently it's going to be the Niemén. All the better—nearer to the enemy's lair. . . . Where has Pleshcheyev got to? . . .

He stepped into the street and screwed his eyes up in amazement—what's this?... The stern war road over which columns moved day and night had been transformed into a Paris street. Streaming down the road were foreigners, laughing and talking at the top of their voices; there were a few girls among them; one tall fellow, wearing a beret, was munching a sandwich, another was jotting something in a notebook as he walked. These were English and American journalists. On catching sight of the Russian Major, the tall fellow in the beret called out in Russian:

"Congratulations on a splendid victory!"

He repeated this to every Russian he met: he really was amazed at the picture the advance presented, and he did not forget his assignment: to write at least five articles, and conversation on the road provided a few vivid touches. . . . He was an Englishman. Unlike the majority of his countrymen, he talked loudly and gesticulated like a Southerner. He began to tell Sergei how he took two Germans prisoner:

"They were hiding in a field right near the road, afraid to go out to your men. Perhaps they heard us speaking English, or could tell that we were not Russians, but whatever the reason, they ran out, put up their hands and shouted: 'We surrender!'"

Sergei laughed:

"The fools. . . . Our men would not have done them any harm. It's different in battle. During a battle our men are fierce. But an hour later. . . . Now you speak Russian. You have probably been in Russia a long time, so you must have noticed that our people are not vindictive. . . . I'll tell you what happened here yesterday. The Germans occupied that wood on the right—do you see it? . . . They wanted to block the road. We called upon them to surrender. They opened fire and killed two of my sappers. We wiped them out; about a dozen of them we captured. While I was interrogating one of them the men shouted: 'What's the use of talking to them? They wouldn't surrender when we told them to. . . . They killed Zakharchenko and Shustov. The bastards!' . . . I asked the German: 'Why didn't you surrender?' He did not answer. Then I asked him: 'Do you still think Germany is going to win the war?' He answered: 'I can't think of anything, I want to drink.' . . . It was very hot yesterday, and this was before the thunderstorm. . . . I told my men to give him some water. They brought him some; he looked at it and said: 'The cup's dirty.' He rinsed the edge of the cup and spilled half the water. Then he drank the rest, wrinkled his nose and said: 'It's warm.' . . . I remember that when we were marching through the steppe in nineteen forty-two I would have been glad to drink water from a puddle. . . . To be quite candid, that German disgusted me. But my sappers said: 'They must be hungry, Comrade Major. Permit us to give them some grub.' . . . I have told you this so that you may understand our men better. . . ."

The Englishman in the beret hurriedly took notes.

The others were excited and said to the girl: "Translate word for word," but she could not keep up with the narrator. When Sergei stopped talking, a short, stout American laughed loudly, exposing his gold teeth, and turning to the interpreter he said:

"Tell the Major...."

"Perhaps you speak French?" Sergei enquired.

"Oh yes, a little. So you speak French? You must be an educated man! . . . I gather from what you have said that you intend to restore Germany to her former strength after the war."

Sergei shrugged his shoulders:

"I am afraid the interpreter didn't put it over right. I related how my sappers took pity on some prisoners of war, that's all. . . ."

"What you said was very interesting for those colleagues of mine who write vivid war sketches, but I send more serious stuff. I am interested in the political aspect of the story you told, and I draw the logical conclusion that the Soviet Union intends to restore Germany to her former strength with the aid of the prisoners of war whom you are feeding."

"I think we have more grounds for hating the Germans than you Americans have. You have no doubt observed that between Gzhatsk and Minsk not a house has been left standing. And it's not only a matter of houses. . . . I have a sergeant in my battalion, a Byelorussian. We arrived in his village, Voloki they called it. But there was no village—just weeds and a common grave. The Germans had killed everybody, do you understand, everybody, even tiny infants. They killed the sergeant's wife, his old mother and three little daughters. That's one count we have against them. . . . And Private Katzel said to me yesterday: 'All my relatives have been wiped out. The vipers murdered twenty-eight of them, I am all alone now.' . . ."

"Very striking details," said the fat man with the gold teeth. "But what interests me is the political aspect. What are you going to do with the Germans?"

"We shall defeat Germany, there's no doubt about that. We would have defeated her without your aid, but with it the end will come sooner, I hope. By the way, I congratulate you on the capture of Cherbourg. I am very glad you have arrived at a time when we, at last, can congratulate you on something. And so. . . ."

He was interrupted by an American wearing dark spectacles, who all this time had been chewing gum and staring dully at Sergei. He said to the girl:

"I don't speak French. . . . So translate. . . . I would like to know whether the Major knows that the United States has been helping them all the time? He could have congratulated us before—half the Russians' victory is ours."

This made Sergei angry:

"I know you helped us. I have eaten your canned pork, and I have spoken over your field telephones. Look, there are your Studebakers. They are good machines, we are very grateful. But you have more machines than modesty. Do you really think it's right to put canned pork in one scale and rivers of human blood in the other? Yes, you sent us Studebakers. We know that. But I was in Stalingrad, and I know that we saved you."

The American with the gold teeth waited impatiently until Sergei had finished:

"A very good wind-up for an article. . . . But you have not answered my question—what's to be done with the Germans?"

"We will defeat Germany, punish the war criminals, but the Germans will remain. I haven't thought about the question. I am a military engineer, not a diplomat nor a pedagogue. The Germans will have to be re-educated, imbued with knowledge, introduced to real progress, to the fundamentals of ethics. . . ."

The American in the dark spectacles grasped the interpreter by the arm:

"Translate this. . . . I agree with him, absolutely. Germany must be preserved. I was a correspondent in Berlin for four years, and I know the Germans well. Germany is a land of Western, Christian civilization. Nobody in our country wants to interfere in Russia's internal affairs, but tell him that many Americans are alarmed—they want to know whether the Russians intend to introduce their system in Germany. I am saying this in the friendliest spirit, we are allies, and it is a journalist's duty to eliminate ambiguity. Ask the officer what they intend to do with Germany."

"What we intend to do with Germany? First of all, capture Berlin and hang the fascists. I am afraid, though, that our correspondent here will not allow us to enter Germany without an American visa. . . ."

The journalists laughed and offered Sergei cigarettes and chocolate. One of them stepped up to Sergei and in a curious jargon of French, Russian and English, said:

"Your humour is quite American. Our readers will appreciate that very much. Couldn't you tell me privately something equally humorous? The United Press get their stuff over quicker than I can. . . ."

Sergei sat and frowned. If Pleshcheyev, or some other officer who had not seen foreigners before, had been present during his conversation with the journalists he would, perhaps, have attached no importance to what the fellow in the dark spectacles had said; he would merely have thought to himself: why do they send such fools? . . . But Sergei remembered prewar Paris, the malice of courteous Nivelle, Roy's clipped moustache, Lancier's pettiness, the greed and blindness of the men

he had come in contact with in business offices and drawing rooms. Who knows what has become of them? Perhaps they are prospering? Or perhaps the Germans have gripped them so hard that they are now applauding us? . . . Their raptures are not worth a kopek! That fellow with the dark spectacles also congratulated us on our victory, but he looked at me like a Fritz who had been dragged out of the forest. They have no love for us, that's obvious. They will never forgive us our victories. . . .

For the first time Sergei realized that the postwar world was not going to be as sky-blue and serene as he had dreamed it would be when he was at the Stalingrad crossing. He looked into the future, and his eyes became dark and hard.

Tanya had not heard the conversation with the foreigners. She looked at Sergei now and was shocked: why, his face is cruel! . . . She walked out quietly and went to the signalmen in the next room.

"Have you been resting, Comrade Major?" enquired Pleshcheyev.

Sergei started up as if he had really been dozing. They discussed their affairs. Pleshcheyev got up to go.

"Stay here for the night," said Sergei. "Those forest rangers get lively after dark. . . ."

In the hut Pleshcheyev found an old school exercise book with equations and he was delighted—he had been a schoolteacher in Kirov before the war. He looked through the book as if it were a beautifully illustrated story.

"When the war ends I'll begin worrying little kids again. . . ."

Then he talked at length about the delight of his profession until he observed suddenly that Sergei was not listening to him.

"Perhaps you want to turn in, Comrade Major?" he enquired.

"No, not at all. . . . Yes, it's nice work, teaching. My mother is a teacher. And we shall need many schools, many, very many books, and bricks, and bridges, and tractors, more than we had before—we have changed, we will have more friends, and more enemies. From those who have much, much is demanded. . . ."

"What do you intend to do after the war, Comrade Major?"

Sergei did not answer. He was standing at the little window. Columns and columns were streaming down the road. At last he said:

"You are right, it's time to turn in."

* 5 *

Major Schiltes was saying indignantly: "I am willing to negotiate with representatives of the Regular Army, but not with bandits." . . . Two hours later he was standing at attention in front of Vasya and saying in clipped phrases, as if he were delivering a report:

"Herr Commander, I always respected the Russians who fought us, even if they were. . . ." He stopped short; he was about to say "bandits," but checked himself in time. He continued in a louder voice: "Even if they were in civvies."

The Major's flushed, sallow face was spotted with dark pimples, like the skin of a plucked chicken; he had fixed, bulging eyes. Vasya looked at him for a moment and turned away. He had often thought how cruel these men were; now he felt that they were also inexpressibly dull. But it was too happy a day to think about Fritzes. Vasya looked at the partisans who were packing up in readiness to leave, at the tree-tops, at the leaf-framed sky, which looked exceptionally blue.

He rode at the head of the column on Major Schiltes' bay horse. The prisoners of war were lined up in the rear. Vasya chuckled: about twice as many as ours. . . .

"Good-bye shacks and dugouts! Good-bye graves of friends! Good-bye aspens, birches, firs and alders. Good-bye forest! For three years have I lived among you. . . . When the Germans were in the suburbs of Moscow, when they had reached the Caucasus, when they were buying building lots in Minsk and concluding twenty-year contracts, here, in this forest, there was a patch of Soviet land. . . ."

Partisans were streaming towards the liberated city from every direction. Here were the famous units: the Two Hundred and Eighth Stalin unit, the Zheleznyak unit, the Chapayev Brigade, the Kutuzov unit, the Four Hundred and Sixth, the "Avengers," the Parkhomenko unit and the Frunze Brigade. It was a motley and exuberant procession. German horses neighed. Mounted on one of these was a handsome lad with soft, flaxen, curly hair, wearing the tunic of a Hungarian officer. A huge German tank clattered, and on it, as if it were a carnival charabanc, were three smiling girls holding Tommy guns. Men hauled captured German artillery. There were carts loaded with partisans' wives and children who had fled from villages in which German punitive detachments had raged, or from ghettos. The commander of one unit wore a German greatcoat, another wore a tattered lustrine jacket. In this procession there were men who had been surrounded by the enemy and had tasted the bitterness of nineteen forty-one, men who had escaped from German concentration camps, peasants and student girls, district Party secretaries and schoolteachers, Caucasians in prewar tunics, Jews who had escaped from the ghetto; in the procession was a round-shouldered, grey-bearded partisan who was called "Old Blacksmith"—he had crushed the skull of a *Sonderführer*—and laughing, eleven-year-old Petrus, who had placed a bomb in a German cinema theatre; there was staid Smirnov who called T.N.T. "tobacco," and the agronomist Chelishchev who was nicknamed "Fierce Misha"; there was Lunts, who had derailed eighteen German trains; there was the Pole Bronewski, who had made his way to the partisans from Byelostok, the Czech František, the Hungarian Jew

Leiser of the "labour battalion," whose work had been to remove mines, the Paris workingman Carnais from the Todt organization. Captured Italian accordions glittered in the sun; a collective farmer from Kostroma pressed the keys of his accordion, and it plaintively rejoiced at this happy day and, rejoicing, wailed that all days were passing—it was an old and wise accordion. A lanky fellow had picked up at a German Staff Headquarters a case full of brand new, undistributed "Iron Crosses." As he passed through the villages on the way he called out to the few surviving dogs which barked at the waggons: "Be quiet, Zhuchka, here's a present from the Führer." ... Gazing at this joker, the old peasant women laughed and cried with joy, and said: "Good luck to you, sonny." ...

In the procession was Lieutenant Sazanov; he with his unit had been surrounded by the enemy on the fourth day of the war. He was severely wounded and pulled through only because he said to himself: I can't die until I see our main forces again. ... There were thirty of them then, and they dashed from one place to another within the enemy ring. Later the unit grew in numbers. A week ago they guided the Tatsinsks' tanks through the Nalibok forest.

In the procession was Ivan Shelega. He has not forgotten how the Germans came to his village. Ivan Shelega had a four-year-old daughter whose name was Marusya and who had greenish, tender eyes. The Germans laid bets as to which of them would score a hit on the child as she ran down the street. Ivan Shelega was grey at twenty-seven. He marched along stern and proud: he had settled accounts with the murderers.

In the procession was little Leah Kogan, carrying a heavy rifle. The Germans hanged her father in the ghetto and burnt her mother and little brothers in Trostyanets. Leah was nineteen. She had shot seven Germans. She was returning to the city where she no longer had a mother, a father or brothers, no longer had any relatives, or a home, but she was conscious of having vanquished the butchers, and a faint smile lit up her thin, haggard face.

The large square outside the Hippodrome rang with noisy revelry. "Partisan greetings to Comrade Stalin!"

Vasya shouted "Hurrah!" with the rest and immediately felt embarrassed. He used to cheer so wildly, so frantically, when he was a boy, and Nina Georgiyevna would say: "Take care, you'll tear your mouth." ...

Vasya was born in Moscow, but gazing at torn and mutilated Minsk, at the vacant-eyed fronts of the gutted buildings and at the streets piled up with rubble, he felt that this was his own native city. Here he had started in his profession. Those buildings over there—he had helped to build them. ... Grass and scrub were growing on the wrecked walls.

When he arrived in this city for the first time he was amazed—fine large buildings side by side with wretched hovels, narrow, crooked

streets, nothing distinctive about the city. The soul of Minsk was secretive and passionate, like the forests of Byelorussia. Gradually, Vasya became attached to the city. When he visited Moscow he would say: "Minsk has blossomed out wonderfully! . . ." On the twenty-first of June he was working on the plans for a new school.

How glad I am that I have come to Minsk, he now thought to himself. It was here that I learnt the biggest thing on earth. . . . Minsk—why, that's Natasha! Although her stay here was very short, everything here is associated with her—the streets through which we roamed, the park, this bench which has survived the storm, the square—where we parted. . . . She came here, told me how they sprayed apple trees from the air, she asked: "Why don't you believe me? . . ." Darling. . . .

When the parade was over, he hastened to that street: the house was no longer there—the Germans blew it up before running away. Suddenly, Vasya's heart was gripped by superstitious horror: What has become of Natasha? . . . Why had he been thinking all the time—if I live, I will meet her. . . . She went away by that frightful road, and he had heard nothing more of her. . . . The joyousness of the day vanished in an instant; the songs the people were singing sounded mournful to Vasya—about a ship that was going out to sea and would probably not return, about a blue kerchief that would be seen no more, about the fire in Odessa. . . . The ruins of the houses reared up and shut out the world. Vasya talked with people, even joked with them, but all the time the thought ran through his mind: what has become of Natasha? . . .

When reading a novel it sometimes seems that the author had been too lazy to think of a better way to unravel the plot than an improbable reunion. But life invents queerer things than that. . . . This idea occurred to Vasya later; when he heard Dmitri Alexeyevich's familiar bass voice he only flung his arms around Krylov and very softly enquired:

"How is Natasha? . . ."

"Alive and well! You have a son—that's the big news! I haven't seen him myself, but Natasha writes wonders about him, he was two in March, and she claims that he can almost recite whole monologues. His name is Vasya, like yours. To cut a long story short. . . ."

Krylov said all this hurriedly, even gruffly, he tried to hide his own agitation, but he failed—his voice broke, he blew his nose and then said almost in a whisper:

"It's a miracle! I had given up all hope; I wrote and told Natasha that I still had hope, but I hadn't. . . ."

"What about Sergei? . . . And Mama? . . ."

"Both alive and well. Natasha wrote that Sergei is a major, and I don't remember how many decorations he's got. Nina Georgiyevna is in Moscow; she sees Natasha every day. Varvara Ilyinichna died in nineteen forty-two. . . . Now tell me something about yourself."

But Vasya could not say anything. He gazed at the photograph of Natasha and his son, gazed and smiled; not a thought was in his mind as he gazed, but later it seemed to him that he had thought a great deal, but did not remember what it was. And Krylov growled again:

"In every letter there was something about you, she did not say it right out, but you could see through it—she is not so very cunning. It's a miracle, a miracle, I tell you! . . . But tell me, how did it happen?"

Vasya tore himself away from his intense, ardent bliss and made an attempt to talk, but could not. Three years had passed away, and all that he remembered now was—a big, green forest.

"I don't know. . . . I have been with the partisans since that July. . . . But what about you? . . . Excuse me, Dmitri Alexeyevich, I don't know how to address you. If I remember right, I used to say 'you.' . . ."

"I have a grandson, your son, do you understand? And you come along with your etiquette. A nice partisan you are!"

Krylov took Vasya along to his hospital base, gave him a good meal and then said to him sternly:

"You will sleep here. You can have a bath, I'll give you some clean underwear, everything as it should be. Have you heard that our forces are near Vilno? It won't be long now. . . . I spoke to a prisoner of war yesterday, a double-dyed fascist, nothing but the grave will change him, but even he surrendered. . . . What do you intend to do?"

"What do you mean—do? Go on fighting, of course."

"Won't you take a trip to Moscow?"

"I can't do that now—we are too busy. I was told that we will be assigned to an army unit. I am an artilleryman, you know that, don't you? We had some artillery during this last year; German, but we hammered them in the Russian way. . . ."

Krylov went off to see his patients. But Vasya read and reread Natasha's last letter to her father, and every time he came to the words: "Sometimes hope revives within me in spite of everything," he smiled.

Krylov came back and glanced at Vasya out of the corner of his eye and thought: he hasn't changed a bit, except that he is thinner. . . . He loves Natasha, one can see that. Then they had a chat, and it seemed to Krylov that he was speaking to a different man. He has changed, changed an awful lot! . . . He is telling me frightful things, and yet he tells them so calmly. . . .

"When did you feel that the turning point had come, at the end of nineteen forty-two?" enquired Krylov.

"No, I personally felt it in October nineteen forty-one."

"At that time I was getting out of Karachev. Things were in an awful mess then. Luckily I found a captain, he helped me. . . . Wait a minute! How could you have felt the turning point then?"

* And not the familiar "thou."—*Tr.*

"We were assigned to a certain regiment—across the Desna. We were smashed up. The situation was awful—some fled, some went into civvies. . . . About forty of us remained. Avanesyan was with me, a splendid fellow. . . . The communiqués were appalling: surrendered Orel, and so forth. Where we got out of a big encirclement we fell into a small one. We were in a wood—like lace, you could see through it. And Germans all around. It was obvious that we couldn't break through. Still, we decided to try. It meant death whichever way we turned, but if we stayed, half the men would desert. I was sitting there, down in the dumps, when a signalsman, Bulanov, his name was, came up to me and said: 'I want to join the Party.' He was about forty. A Tula man. We held a meeting. Guns were banging away like hell, but in spite of that, the members spoke, the Lieutenant introduced Bulanov. . . . Can you understand what I felt, Dmitri Alexeyevich? The Germans were yelling 'it's all up with Soviet Russia,' we were cut off, all we had was one machine gun and some rifles, and yet, at a moment like that, a man comes along and wants to join the Party! I said to Avanesyan then: Of course we'll hold out. . . ."

"Where is Bulanov?" Dmitri Alexeyevich enquired gruffly.

"He was killed. In that very spot. . . . Fourteen of us fought our way out. Later, Avanesyan and I collected a unit. He was killed in the spring of nineteen forty-two. . . ."

Vasya recalled Avanesyan's love, how his Natasha had gone 'out scouting and never returned; and a feeling of sadness overcame him, warm, like a summer mist. Soon he fell asleep, and as he dozed off everything became mixed up in his mind: Minsk, the songs of the partisans, Bulanov's hoarse, muffled voice, and Avanesyan saying "what a mess," the forest, a huge forest, you couldn't get out of it and two Natashas—one alive and one dead. . . .

Krylov was lying in the next bed. He had not undressed—he thought he was falling asleep, he had not the strength to get up. He was lying with his eyes open. Suddenly, he felt mortally weak. His heart beat rapidly one moment and slowly the next, his left shoulder and arm ached, he found it hard to breathe. Vasya had turned up alive. Natasha will be all right now. . . . We have reached Vilno, so the end will be coming soon. . . . Krylov had been sustained up till now by the constant strain. Now that the climax was visible and he was relieved of anxiety about Natasha, he could afford for one night at least to give himself up to weariness, to illness, to the irregular beating of his heart that was like the motion of a machine that had long been in service. He would be fifty-six in August. . . . We are finishing the game, Dmitri Alexeyevich. . . . He himself did not know what game he was thinking of—the war, or his own life.

Valya was scarcely recognizable, she had grown thin, her eyes burned feverishly and her movements became impulsive and uncertain. She had learned of the death of her parents as far back as January, their neighbour Kudryavtseva had written: "Your old folks died during the occupation." Valya wept for a long time after she received that letter. Later she remembered that her grief then had been light compared with what she had still to bear. . . .

In March, her old school chum Misha Zolotorenko came to see her. At one time Misha had been in love with Zina and had wanted to become a "Pickwickian," but the girls had not liked him—he was interested in nothing but sports, and was rather rough. Valya was delighted to see him—he reminded her of the past, and when he told her that he had been in Kiev she bombarded him with questions. Misha had searched for his old friends, but had been unable to find any of them.

"Zina turned out to be a real heroine. There was an article about her in the newspaper, I cut it out. Here it is. . . . Who would have thought it! . . ."

Tears trickled from Valya's eyes. She said:

"One day she said to me: 'I don't know whether I shall be able to give expression to what is in me.' . . . At that time I thought that she intended to write, but she expressed herself in real life. . . . Your surprise shows that you did not know her well. It would have been surprising in the case of anyone of us, but in her case it was natural. I discussed death with her on several occasions. . . ."

Misha told her what he knew about the others:

"Borya was with the partisans, what has happened to him I don't know. The Germans killed his mother at the very beginning. Raya is at the front. Her little daughter and her mother-in-law were killed in Bahby Yar. Galochka was deported to Germany. . . ."

"The laughing girl?"

How strange that jolly nickname sounded! Tears were still streaming from Valya's eyes.

"Life was a general mix up there," said Misha. "You can't make head or tail of it. Even now I can't understand why your father allowed himself to be taken in by them. . . ."

In saying that he thought that Valya knew everything; at the very opening of the conversation he had asked her whether she knew what had happened to her parents and she had nodded. Valya shrieked:

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. . . . Didn't you know?"

"Tell me! . . ."

"I don't know all the details, Valya. . . . Evidently, he hadn't the strength of mind to hold out and went into their service. Kudryavtseva

told me that your mother took it greatly to heart. . . . Afterwards, he hanged himself."

Valya stopped crying. She sat and stared at Misha, but he realized that she did not see him. He stayed a little while longer and then went away.

Valya forthwith wrote to Kudryavtseva. She waited for an answer for over a month—the hope still lingered in her breast that Misha had got the facts wrong. . . . At last the answer came. Valya had always surprised her friends by the enormous importance she attached to people's sentiments and conduct (Borya used to say: "Valya thinks in big categories"); this was all the more surprising because Valya herself seemed weak-willed, if anything, indistinct, "sleepy," as her mother used to say. When anybody had been struck with a fleeting passion for her, the depth and complexity of love caused her pain. Long ago when Zina was still self-willed and enthusiastic, Valya had regarded her as a heroine. Probably, this was due to the fact that Valya saw no boundary between the novels she read and the real life around her. Others may have regarded her father's conduct as a sign of weakness. In fact, Kudryavtseva wrote: "He turned out to be a rag." But to Valya, her father became the incarnation of treachery. She called to mind the scenes of her childhood in the endeavour to find an explanation; the kindly school-teacher in a tussore-silk jacket watering the flowers in his garden, or lamenting over the fact that the young people of the present day were too pushful, did not fit in with the picture of a villainous traitor. "So I was blind," mused Valya, bitterly. "I lived side by side with him and saw nothing. . . ."

She felt as if she herself were implicated in some base action. She frightened the factory manager next morning when she came to him, very pale, but calm, and looking him straight in the face with bright, fixed eyes, she said in a low voice: .

"I want to ask you—can you continue to employ me in this war plant? It turns out that my father was a traitor."

The manager talked to her for a long time in the endeavour to comfort her, assured her that everybody had a high opinion of her, including the Party organizer and the shop foreman, but mentally, Valya kept repeating to herself: I too must be a rotter if I did not see that my father was one. . . .

"Lida, why do you trust me? Perhaps I too am capable of treachery."

Lida retorted angrily: .

"Stop talking nonsense! They are letting you alone, so that shows that nobody even thinks of such a thing. Haven't you enough real troubles without inventing imaginary ones? . . ."

The only one Valya believed was Sergei—when he wrote and told her that he loved her more than ever before; for the first time since

Misha had been to see her, she broke into tears. That was in May. Slowly, she returned to life. She was not what she had been before; something had snapped within her, she knew that she would never rid herself of this, but after receiving Sergei's letter she realized that she would live. Her love for him became greater, more intense.

In returning to life she involuntarily pondered over her future. Raya used to complain that she had no prospects: she said that while Valya would become an actress, she could find no place in life. But Raya is fighting now, like Borya and Seryozha. I am working, of course, but can you compare this with what they are doing? . . . Besides, this is casual work I am doing, I may be working well, but it is casual all the same. For Lida, it is something permanent, her own, I am only a visitor here. What will I do when the war is over? Why did I renounce art? Perhaps I have some talent after all? . . .

She tried to drive away temptation, she scolded herself: this is sheer folly; I'll have a child and this restlessness will pass off! Twice she took part in amateur theatricals. The stage manager of the city theatre, the actors and the audiences all congratulated her: "You have real talent." And then Valya forgot her pledge: her longing gained the upper hand. . . .

It was a sultry day in July. Valya was working well, as she had worked before. In the evening she came home tired. In a cup on her small table stood a gorgeous rose—a gift from Lida. Some of the petals had dropped, but there was nothing sad about that—fatigue, perhaps even overflowing happiness, excess of perfection. Images, lines and sounds ran through Valya's mind. She sat down to write to Sergei—she wrote to him nearly every day now.

"Seryozha, everybody is now talking about the end of the war and is making plans for the future. I am superstitious and afraid to think about this, but I think about it just the same. You know that you are everything to me, I do not want to deceive you; at times my old dream awakens within me, probably it is innate within me, I told you that I am an unsuccessful actress. Perhaps it is because I have no other means of self-expression. I don't know. If it is folly, scold me, and I promise you that I will stop thinking about it—you know that I believe every word you say. Oh, how I would like to play Juliet and say what otherwise I could never say, even to you.

*Conceit, more rich in matter than in words,
Braggs of his substance, not of ornament:
They are but beggars that can count their worth;
But my true love is grown to such excess,
I cannot sum up sum of half my wealth. . . .*

"All this is childish. The main thing is that all shall be well with you, the communiqués are splendid, every one is like a letter from you—

the war will end soon and you will come home. Keep well, darling. May my love protect you; of greater love than mine for you I cannot conceive."...

While she was writing the rose shed its petals, and they lay scattered on the table like crimson blotches.

* 7 *

The war "made up" and changed its costume like an actor, but still it remained war. Near the town there were picturesque hills, green valleys and a winding river. In some way the town reminded Sergei of the ancient towns in France. Here, too, there were ancient, narrow streets, little baroque churches with statues of martyrs who were suffering too theatrically, and with fluttering cherubs, a castle on the hill, taverns with colourful signs, gardens with huge roses, scarlet, tea and pale-yellow, and numerous meditating trees—maple, oak and lime.

Guns roared incessantly, machine guns rattled. The pavements were bestrewn with corpses of soldiers, and of civilians who had accidentally been caught in the line of fire. Near the Ostrobram Gates an old woman in a kerchief was on her knees praying for something to the beautiful, dispassionate Virgin.

Sergei stepped into an abandoned house. The walls were hung with coloured photographs of Nice with an intensely blue sea and palm trees, a crucifix of yellow ivory, and a portrait of a lady in a ruched dress. On a green velvet-covered armchair squatted an aged fox terrier forgotten by its master; the dog did not bark nor whine, it merely cocked its head and meditated sadly about what was going on. Sergei picked up a book that was lying open, evidently somebody had been reading it an hour, perhaps, before the battle. It was a small volume of poems.

I disturbed the profound slumber of the rose.

In the dark basement, down below, some women and children and an old man in a flowery Turkish robe were sitting among empty barrels. Every time a shell burst close by they exclaimed: "Lord Jesus!..."

The Divisional C.P. was situated in the basement of an abandoned house. It was the same here as it had been in the C.P. in the ravine in the steppe, and in the dugout near the Dnieper. In the same way the Chief-of-Staff, a sickly-looking Colonel with intelligent, tired eyes, sat poring over a map marked with coloured pencil, only this time the map was a plan of the town; fighting was proceeding for the narrow streets, for houses, for deep, half-dark courtyards. And in the same way as near Orel, or near Chernobyl, a gloomy-looking General said to the signals girl: "Put me on to Yerushkin," and the girl kept on repeating: "Put me through to Lily of the Valley"; and then the General shouted into

the receiver: "What are you messing around for? Don't interfere, I am speaking! Can you hear me? What are you messing around for?" And in the same way he explained to the Army Commander five minutes later that Yerushkin was not to blame: the tanks failed to get through, the walls were very strong. . . . And in the streets, as they had done in the fields, the men ran crouching across the space of twenty or thirty paces that separated one position from another, and life from death. And in the same way the girl orderlies picked up the wounded, while all around artillery and mortar shells were bursting.

The General said to Sergei:

"The Commander wants to see you. His C.P. is at the entrance to the town, opposite the Ros Cemetery."

Sergei could not help smiling:

"A poetic name. There are a lot of roses here."

The General smiled too, and his stern, unfriendly face that looked as though it had been carved out of very hard grey stone, suddenly looked dreamy.

"Yes, wonderful roses. . . . Only the cemetery is not called Rose, but Ros. I don't know why it is called that. Perhaps because the dew* is of a special kind there. . . ."

His face hardened again, and he shouted: "Put me on to Yerushkin."

The Army Commander was engaged—a member of the Military Council of the Front had arrived to see him. Sergei was told that the General would be busy for an hour.

It was a warm day. The rain was coming down in a fine drizzle. In the cemetery the roses were in full bloom. The air was impregnated with the scent of flowers and moist grass. Sergei inspected the gravestones, pretentious and graceful, with mourning angels, tender couplets and wreaths of evergreens. Some of the gravestones were over a hundred years old; the names on them had been obliterated by time, of the epitaphs and vows only isolated words were left: "separation . . . tears . . . forever. . . ."

The cemetery served as the mustering centre for prisoners of war. Dejected, unshaven Germans roamed among the marble and the roses. One of them addressed Sergei:

"Perhaps the Herr Major speaks German, or French, or English?"

"I speak French. What do you want?"

"I would like to ask Monsieur le Major, what is going to happen to us. A lieutenant told us that the Reds refuse to recognize the Geneva Convention and kill prisoners of war."

"You still fail to see that your officers are fooling you."

"It would be hard for that lieutenant to fool me. He has not even

* The General said "rossa"—the Russian word for "dew."—Tr.

had a full secondary school education, whereas I was a lecturer at the Marburg University. But my field is not international law, it is Sanskrit. How should I know what the Russians do to prisoners of war? I have been here less than two months."

"Where were you before you came here?"

"Everywhere. In Narvick. They build houses on piles there and they eat smoked venison. I was in Greece and saw the Propylaea, but the wine is bad there, stinks of tar, not a bit like nectar. I was in Egypt. My younger brother was in Russia. He is a student. He wrote that the Crimea surprisingly reminded one of the Riviera..."

Sergei looked at the conceited German in disgust. He asked him:

"Well, why have you been roaming from one country to another?"

The prisoner answered in an offended tone:

"We were fighting, Monsieur le Major, and fighting well. It was here that misfortune befell us. General Stael told us that a hundred tanks were coming to our aid, but they didn't turn up for some reason..."

Sergei walked away from the garrulous German; he watched a rose-bush shed its petals under the fine network of rain. And the German, reassured by his talk with the Russian Major, sat down on a gravestone, drew out a sandwich wrapped in wax paper and began to munch it greedily.

The Army Commander said to Sergei:

"These are their strongpoints—the prison, the churches and this grove. The infantry are being held up. . . . We want a passage made for the tanks. Do you understand me?"

Sergei inspected the area and decided to send a group of sappers with canisters to the street that ran parallel to it. They could get through one of the houses—climb up to the second floor window. There were Germans in the courtyard. . . . If they got into the next street they could blow up the building and dismantle the barricade. Sergei put Lieutenant Gusarov in charge of this operation. The lieutenant, a fun-loving, green-eyed student at the Builders' Institute, whom everybody called Yasha, was an experienced explosive expert.

"Be very careful, Yasha..."

Sergei climbed to the fourth floor to watch the operation. He stood at the window, which was protected by sandbags; Germans had been there only that morning. Sergei saw the sappers creep up, he saw Lieutenant Gusarov drop dead from the bullet of a tommy gunner. Then a perfect geyser of fire, smoke and bricks shot up. Our tanks appeared at the end of the street.

Sergei glanced round the room he was in. He saw a globe, some test tubes, against the wall a glass case with dull, faded butterflies—and next to it a dead German was lying with outflung arms.

Sergei did not hear Sergeant Gorski say:

"You had better come away, Comrade Major. The Germans have got the range..."

Everything staggered—the sergeant, the globe and the butterflies. Sergei was wounded. The sergeant helped him to reach the dark, winding staircase. Some cats dashed away howling. Down below somebody was wailing: "Lord Jesus!..." Sergei felt his knees giving way. He sat down on a step; his shoulder pained him very much, everything swayed in front of his eyes as if the house were collapsing. Then the orderlies came.

The Germans began to surrender. They were still holding on in the grove on the western outskirts of the town. In the centre the jeeps were already dashing about. There were whole lines of abandoned German trucks; the square in front of the big building which had served as the German Headquarters was littered with tommy guns, steel helmets, books, crates of hand grenades, cases of cigarettes, soap and medals. Rain was coming down in torrents. A little soldier gazed mournfully at the junk and bewailed the good smokes that were being spoiled; he picked up a small jar with a fanciful label, turned it over and over, smelled it and asked the interpreter what it was. The interpreter translated: "French cream. To prevent sunburn." The little soldier dashed the jar to the ground and swore so fiercely that all the prim saints must have shuddered. Lieutenant-Colonel Yerushkin wiped his face with his sleeve and eagerly drank water with a scoop. The Army Commander reported to the Chief-of-Staff of the Front: "The grove is liquidated. We have captured a hundred and fifty-six guns..." And in Moscow, the radio announcer, taking a deep breath, rehearsed the words: "Vilnius, the capital of the Lithuanian Soviet Republic, was captured by storm."

Sergei was lying at the battalion hospital base; his wound no longer hurt, but he still felt weak. The nurse brought him a bunch of flowers and said with a note of sadness in her voice:

"They are in their last bloom; the petals fall when you pluck them..."

The rain stopped. The sky brightened, and the trees on the hill looked exceptionally green.

The surgeon said in surprise:

"You must have been born under a lucky star. A half a centimetre more to the right, and we would have had an entirely different picture. As it is, you will be back in the fighting line in a month..."

Sergei read Valya's letter—Sergeant Gorski had given it to him when they were going into the city. He read the words: "May my love protect you" and smiled meditatively. In a month I will be back in the fighting line... There will still be plenty of fighting to do, those Germans have learned nothing, like that lout in the cemetery... Poor Yasha... I can't understand how I got out alive. It

must indeed have been my lucky star. . . . This is the fourth wound, and all trifling. . . .

Dusk fell. Stars appeared over the hill and trees, big stars, like the lights of a distant city, or the fireflies that fill the black nights in the South. "What is a star?" Sergei asked himself in semi-consciousness. "Valya's love? The star on a pilot cap? Or those—so distant and yet so near that I will get up this minute and catch one—let it shine in the dugout. . . ."

* 8 *

This was a small town in the mountains; although its surroundings were distinguished for their picturesqueness, tourists did not tarry here—there were coal mines in the vicinity and black dust penetrated the nostrils to the vexation of the traveller, it settled in thick layers on the Town Hall, on the grass in the square and on the workers' hovels. The Germans who were stationed in the town cursed their fate; they were ready to resign themselves to the gloomy landscape, but there had been unrest here even in the winter, and now the "black faces," as Lieutenant Schmidt called the miners, had got entirely out of hand.

The only comfort Captain von Gerlach could find was—it must be still worse somewhere on the Niemen. In conversation with his friends von Gerlach would emphasize that he was an "epicurean," he was, fond of silk underwear, dry champagne and leisure. He was lucky: he was not sent to the front. Last summer, when they were searching for hidden arms, he came across a splendid painting by Boucher. Often he mused: when the war ends he will sell the painting, buy a house in Schwalbach and marry a quiet, domesticated girl—he had had enough of war, and of bachelor's life too. If only he got out of here alive! . . .

The miners struck work on the fourteenth of July. Before the war, people used to dance on this day; perspiring musicians would be perched on platforms and blow their instruments. Waitresses served beer and lemonade. Mysterious paper lanterns gleamed among the dark leaves of the plane trees. They danced until the morning, and the Town Hall square looked like a vast ballroom. Who, at that time, remembered that the Fourteenth of July meant not only the beginning of the summer vacation, dancing and fireworks? . . . Now the miners gathered at the Jaurès monument. The wind from the mountains caused the heavy tri-coloured flag to flutter. On a platform stood Pauline; from a distance she looked like a statue; her face was lit up by miners' lamps. In a thin but clear voice she repeated the ancient vow: "Liberty or death!" Thousands of voices answered: "Liberty or Death! . . ." And the surrounding echo repeated: "Death!"

Josette, or Pauline as she was now called, had been working in this district since the autumn. She had grown up far away from this place,

in the north of France, but everything here reminded her of her childhood—the laborious toil of the miners, their lugubrious jokes and their dour kindness. Here they understood her at a glance, they believed her, said to each other: “Pauline said.” . . .

The strike swiftly spread over the whole district. It was reported that clashes with the Germans had taken place in some of the mining villages.

Lieutenant Schmidt burst into von Gerlach’s study in a frightful panic and exclaimed:

“They must be dispersed at once! . . .”

The Captain was lying on a couch. The window shutters were closed tight, but this did not prevent the sounds of cheering and the strains of the “Marseillaise” from penetrating the room.

“Don’t talk so loud,” said the Captain. “When I have an attack, I must have absolute quiet. And besides, I’d like to know how you are going to disperse them. We have sixty men, the miners number three thousand.”

“Those black faces have no arms.”

“You are mistaken. The captain of the French gendarmes told me that the terrorists have three or four hundred American tommy guns. All you want is to fight. . . . But who will answer for the lives of my subordinates? . . .”

“But Herr Captain. . . .”

“I told you I had an attack, didn’t I? Go away, and give orders that I am not to be disturbed. As for those fellows shouting out there, you can ignore them. I, thank God, have been in France for three years and I know them by now. They’ll shout until they are tired and then disperse. . . .”

Sergeant Kranz was waiting for Schmidt:

“What’s the Captain’s orders?”

“His orders? That he is not to be disturbed, he’s had an attack. . . .”

“Perhaps we ought to call the doctor?”

Lieutenant Schmidt laughed:

“Doctors can’t cure his illness. . . . They say that generals die in their beds. Captain von Gerlach is determined to be a general. . . .”

The Germans who were in the neighbouring mining villages caught fright and fled to the town. In the streets the miners were loudly singing the “Marseillaise” and the “Internationale.” A messenger informed Josette that a partisan unit from the neighbouring mountains had decided to storm the town. In the evening of the fifteenth of July Lieutenant Schmidt reported to von Gerlach:

“Everybody is saying that the terrorists have decided to break into the town. It will be disastrous if we allow them to come here—they may supply the black faces with arms. Must we wait until we are torn to pieces? . . .”

The Captain made an effort to smile:

"The boy is dying for a fight, isn't he? Very well, I have no objection. . . . I am sorry I will not be able to see how you conduct operations—I feel worse today. . . ."

The battle lasted from midday to nightfall. The Germans lost thirty men. The partisans also sustained casualties. Towards evening Lieutenant Schmidt ordered his men to fall back on the town. The Germans barricaded themselves in their barracks.

Three hundred partisans lined up in the square. The miners hugged them and begged: "Give us arms, we'll go with you to attack Albi." . . . Many of the partisans had their families in the town and these dispersed to their homes. It was a hot, dark and noisy night—everybody sang, cheered, and congratulated everybody else.

In the Town Hall Noel, the commander of the unit, and Pauline discussed the plan for capturing the barracks.

"How many rifles have you?" Pauline enquired.

"Twenty-eight, and also two tommy guns, forty-three revolvers, and thirty-six grenades. The majority of my men have nothing but dirks. Can anything be obtained here?"

"The A.S. has a whole arsenal. We called a coordination meeting, but they refuse to do anything. We have my tommy gun and seventeen revolvers. That's all."

At eleven in the evening, Sergeant Kranz handed Captain von Gerlach a sealed envelope. The Captain read the following:

"As you are aware, the town and the whole surrounding district is under our control. Tomorrow, Major Léger's partisan regiment, with artillery, and the Liberté unit will join us. To avoid unnecessary bloodshed, I hereby order you to surrender. All the German officers and men will be treated in conformity with international conventions. A reply must be given no later than six a.m. on July 17th, 1944.

Captain Noel."

Von Gerlach jumped up from his couch: he even forgot he was ill. . . . Oh, horror! The war is ending, but I will perish here! Why am I not in Normandy? Things are ever so much easier there! . . . If the Americans were here I would surrender without any hesitation. . . . But I can't surrender to the terrorists, they will begin to settle accounts. . . . I wanted to live in peace with the French, but they are compelling even me to fight. . . ."

At midnight, the partisans who were guarding the Town Hall detained a German soldier. They led him into the Mayor's office. Pauline was sitting in an armchair. Noel was sleeping with his head resting on a law book. As soon as he stepped across the threshold the soldier said:

"I am an Austrian."

Noel awoke with a start and, still dazed with sleep, exclaimed:

"Have you got a tommy gun?"

"No."

"What did you come nosing into here for, if you haven't got a tommy gun?"

"I told you, I am an Austrian. I don't want to fight any more. It has all gone too far, and it is evident now that the Germans are going to be beaten. I am an Austrian. There is also a Pole there, he wants to desert too. Don't think the Germans intend to surrender. Captain von Gerlach telephoned to the Commandant of Albi. And Lieutenant Schmidt has just told us that we've got to hold on, as a detachment from Albi is coming at dawn with tanks. . . ."

Noel growled:

"All right. Clear out and get a tommy gun. You are no use to us without one."

When the soldier left Noel said to Pauline:

"That's bad. They have lots of troops in Albi. We'll have to go, otherwise we'll be caught in a trap."

"I'll try to have another talk with Legland," said Josette. "They have two hundred tommy guns and several machine guns, I know that for certain—one of our men was on the spot when they received them. . . ."

Before the war, if you looked in at the Café Royal, you were sure to find lawyer Legland there. He never played cards as the other frequenters of the café did, he was always arguing—about the last cantonal elections, or about the forthcoming parliamentary elections, he criticized cabinets, foretold crises, was indignant now with the Vatican and now with Moscow; he had been a Socialist, became a Radical and then went back to the Socialists; when he discussed politics, he would invariably address his interlocutor, if the latter were an old friend, as "citizen," hold him by his coat button and splutter in his face. In nineteen forty he suddenly announced: "I am fed up with politics, I have a family to keep. I am no adventurer, nor a featherbrained boy." He was in a great funk then and nearly came out in praise of Pétain. It was his wife who restrained him: "Why do you want to get mixed up in this dirty business again?" she said. Now Legland claimed that he had carried out a mysterious commission for de Gaulle as far back as nineteen forty. Nobody took him seriously, but for all that, he became the leader of the local A.S. and even a delegate of the London B.S.R.A.; everybody understood that you couldn't do without Legland, for before the war he had been Deputy Mayor, chairman of the local branch of the League of the Rights of Man, and the leading spirit in the League for the Protection of Secular Education in the Department of the Tarn.

Josette stood a long time ringing the bell. It was two o'clock in the morning. Madame Legland was convinced that the Germans had come to take her husband. When she saw that it was Pauline, she was so glad that she almost hugged her. Legland appeared wearing a raincoat over his striped pyjamas.

"They have called for a detachment from Albi," Josette told him. "If we don't arm at least all the partisans, we are lost..."

Legland yawned, but pretended that he had sighed:

"I warned you, Citoyenne Pauline, that this was a reckless gamble..."

"The entire situation will change if you supply us with arms..."

"I am surprised at you. You are a public personage, a representative of the F.T.P., but you reason like a child. I can place my house, my revolver, my life at your disposal. Our common work and common danger have united us... But the arms are not my private property, they are the property of the Republic. They have been given to us not for boyish adventures, but for G-Day..."

"All during the spring you were saying that G-Day meant the Allied landing. Six weeks have passed..."

"You didn't understand me right. G-Day may extend over several months. We will take action when London proclaims a general insurrection."

"But the insurrection has commenced."

"Prematurely. The insurrection will break out in zones as the Allied forces approach them. You are guided by the interests of one party, one class, whereas we are thinking of the nation. Our object is to help the Allies to liberate France. But the Allied forces are still in Normandy, over a thousand kilometres from here..."

Josette got up and said:

"I don't understand—what you are? Frenchmen, representatives of the Intelligence Service, or quartermasters for the Americans?"

Legland lost his self-control. He rushed towards Josette and, spluttering in her face, he exclaimed:

"We have been French from the day we were born, but you became French by order—on the twenty-second of June, nineteen hundred and forty-one. Do you understand me?"

Josette answered in a low, meditative voice, as if she were speaking to herself:

"I have heard this before—in nineteen thirty-nine, when you put us into prison and were preparing to surrender. Even now it is not the Germans you fear, but the workers. Au revoir, Monsieur Legland, pardon me for having troubled you."

It was still dark when the partisans left the town. Many of the miners left with them. The wives and children of the strike leaders went too. Noel ordered them to break up into small groups and to meet near

the pass; the Germans would not dare to show up there. Josette led the group of married miners. Near Quatre Routes they encountered some Germans. The Germans shouted: "Halt!" This was in a valley strewn with large boulders and carpeted with grey, prickly grass. The Germans saw several of the men disappear behind boulders and opened fire. Josette shouted:

"You get away!"

She lay down behind a boulder and fired a burst. Two Germans dropped; the rest lay down and opened fire. The miners, their wives and children were already in safety: they managed to reach the slope of the mountain where there were deep, narrow clefts.

The Germans went on further, they were in a hurry to get to the town. The miners ran up to Josette and found her clinging to the boulder with both her arms. Her face bore a look of tension that was unrelaxed by death, it seemed as though she were still shooting. The miners carried her body up the mountain and buried her under a spreading elm, near the pass. Nobody knew her real name, all they knew about her was that she was born in a miner's family in Picardy. On her gravestone they wrote: "Pauline, a miner's daughter, daughter of the people. July 17, 1944."

Lieutenant Schmidt exclaimed, waving his arms enthusiastically:

"The terrorists have gone!..."

"I don't know what you are so glad about," said von Gerlach. "They are gone today, but may be here again tomorrow..."

And Captain von Gerlach thought to himself: If only I could get away from here, take the Boucher and go to Schwalbach. No, I am afraid I will never get away from here... It's all very well for an idiot like Schmidt—he imagines this is still nineteen forty... And von Gerlach flung himself wearily upon his couch:

"Tell them not to disturb me any more."

The old elm stood like a sentry over Josette's grave. There were few trees in this vicinity, and these lived in solitude and meditation; the inhabitants of the surrounding villages knew them well; they were in the habit of saying: "I rested under the aspen tree near the mill." "Marie and I met near the old maple tree." "Meet me at the plane tree near the stream." The partisans discussed plans for another raid upon the town and a comrade who had arrived from Albi said to Noel: "We shall meet at the old elm." Noel waited for him, and as he waited, he mused: how much strength that little woman possessed!... Then he listened to the incessant rustling of the leaves and thought: they are saying something, but what it is I cannot understand... The language of the tree was simple and enigmatic, like the music that Josette had loved.

"Mum is a brick, look at the letters she writes!" Minayev would say to himself reproachfully, whenever the weariness of the fourth year of the war came over him. But Maria Mikhailovna had shown signs of weakness lately; she would not have written Mitya about it, not for anything, of course. She still kept up well in the daytime, but no sooner did she go to bed than her whole body ached. She had always been fond of lying in bed with several pillows under her head, but now she would get up in the middle of the night and sit in the dark with wide open eyes and think—about Mitya, about her neighbours, about the war; she would grow so tired that her thoughts became muddled, but sleep would not come.

Much had changed in the communal apartment which Minayev had called the "ark." The Kazakovs, husband and wife, now occupied the Parshins' room; later the Parshins returned from Barnaul, but the Kazakovs refused to leave the room; the District Housing Department claimed that the Parshins had forfeited their right to it because they had stopped paying the rent, but the District Attorney supported the Parshins. The case dragged on for four months and at last the Parshins regained their room. Shurochka's husband had been severely wounded near Gomel the previous autumn; he came home without a leg, and now, hobbling on his crutches, he would say to Shurochka: "I am a burden to you," but she would answer: "No, you are not, I love you more than ever, stop worrying about it, we'll manage somehow." ... Irina Petrovna's son had distinguished himself again; he came home on leave in the spring and received a decoration in the Kremlin; the apartment echoed with his heavy footsteps, sailor's slang and tales about the distant Arctic Sea. Natasha, Irina Petrovna's daughter, was now married. Katzman's wife returned from Alma Ata, and on entering the apartment she wept loudly: everything in it reminded her of Grisha. The war had long shifted from the Moscow suburbs to Poland, to the Carpathians, to the frontiers of Germany. Things had become easier for the people, and perhaps, for that reason, harder. Formerly, Irina Petrovna had not noticed the hardships of daily life, but now she was vexed when she was unable to cash in on her ration cards, or when the electric light was cut off. The three years of war had worn everybody down, had frayed their nerves. Suddenly Irina Petrovna would quarrel with Parshin's wife over a saucepan and she would be ashamed of it afterwards—one would think the war was over already. ... Looking at the streets of Moscow one could, indeed, forget that there was a war on; there were lots of automobiles in the streets, and there seemed to be more people about than before the war; people talked about theatre tickets, rooms, rations and special ration cards. But this picture was deceptive. Of course, the people had become accustomed to the war; one gets ac-

customed to everything, they got accustomed to victories, they said: "There will be two salutes today, one for Pskov and another, I missed what for." . . . They got accustomed to their separation from their dear ones. But beneath that outward calm lurked anxiety, grief for lost ones, hope of an early reunion.

When Katzman gazed at the green and red lights that lit the sky at night he felt with exceptional acuteness that Grisha would never again dash into the room with the cry: "Papa, Dynamo won three to one." . . . And when the radio announcer said in a solemn voice: "Eternal glory to the fallen heroes," David Grigoryevich recalled the first year of the war. There were no rockets and no triumphant salutes then. . . .

Maria Mikhailovna was now more anxious about Mitya than ever before. He is married now, they ought to be living peacefully here, but both of them are fighting. . . . At night she listened to the sounds of the apartment: the tapping of Volkov's crutches, the suppressed sobs coming from Katzman's room—Anna Borisovna gave vent to her grief only at night when her husband was away at the printing office. And then Maria Mikhailovna would feel frightened, she would take from her chest of drawers Mitya's letters, the photograph of her new daughter-in-law and a small photograph of her son he had taken for a certificate, and she would gaze at them, put them to her lips, hold them tightly as if wishing to protect frail happiness from death.

It was a hot July day. Maria Mikhailovna was sitting at her sewing machine when Katzman called to her:

"Look out of the window. . . ."

German prisoners of war were being led down the Sadovaya. Volkov knocked at the door and asked permission to see the procession, his window looked out on to the backyard.

Down below crowds lined the pavement; there were neither outcries nor jeers. The people gazed at the Germans in silence; it was a weighty silence, and some of the Germans, unable to bear the looks cast at them by the women, turned their heads away.

Maria Mikhailovna had never been able to picture the men who had done everybody so much harm, who had killed Grisha and had crippled Volkov. She gazed at the Germans and tried to grasp something that was very important.

The procession was headed by generals. Looking at one of them, Maria Mikhailovna shook her head reproachfully: quite an old man— isn't he ashamed of himself? . . . Then came the officers; there were many elderly men among them. The procession halted. Maria Mikhailovna's eyes met those of one of the officers; she went cold all over— there was so much malice in those eyes. She said in a low voice:

"Real murderers. . . ."

Volkov growled:

"I've seen enough of them. . . ."

He went back to his room. And Katzman stopped looking through the window; he sat down on the bed and looked so depressed that Maria Mikhailovna sat down beside him and said:

"We have caught them, the accursed ones, they cannot restore the dead, let them at least restore the cities...."

Katzman said:

"They look to you like murderers, but I can't even feel that. They are just ordinary men, if they were put into different clothes you would never tell.... They chew, whatever it is, talk and laugh. And yet they buried little children alive.... That's the most terrible part about it—people can be converted into anything. Why, they were children too.... But Grisha...."

He broke down. Maria Mikhailovna put her arm around him and said:

"Everybody is born the same, that's true, but what inspires a man?... I am talking about the soul.... Think about that, David Grigoryevich—Grisha is the victor...."

One of the prisoners of war was Schirke. He looked with curiosity at the city and at the people. Big buildings, like those in Berlin, and next to them mere huts. There were too many people.... Schirke had expected the Russians to hurl abuse, even stones, but the Russians were silent, and he thought to himself with disgust: the Orient.... It had been a mistake to send Ribbentrop to negotiate with the English. It would have been better to make concessions to the English, win the favour of the Americans and crush these.... It is doubtful whether we shall win the war now. We will have to put everything off for another twenty years.... I wonder whether they will issue cigarettes to us regularly?... He was behaving with caution, weighed up in his mind whether it would be wise to join the officers who were now speaking against the Führer. Presuming we are going to lose, I ought to join them and so save myself for the future. Sooner or later the Americans and the English will quarrel with the Reds, and then our day will come.... What expressionless faces these Russians have! There's an old man and an old woman up at the window staring dully at us, there isn't even anger in their eyes....

A captain was walking at Schirke's side. He said:

"Horrible! They are looking at us as if we are not human.... It would be better if they abused us...."

Schirke shrugged his shoulders. These are the fellows who are to blame for our misfortune. A captain—and yet he is snivelling!... There are lots of cowards and double-dealers around the Führer. They say the Reds are already near the frontier.... But never mind, we'll achieve our object one day. Hans will march through the streets of Moscow not as I am doing now, but as the victor....

Suddenly, a little boy pointed at Schirke and exclaimed:

"Look, Mummy! Look at that Fritz! I'm frightened...."

The mother smiled and said:

"Silly boy. You needn't be frightened, he's muzzled now...."

That evening, Maria Mikhailovna wrote to her son:

"DEAR MITENKA,

"The murderers were led through Moscow today and afterwards the streets were washed down, and I thought to myself: it is easier to wash paving stones than them; however much you wash them you can never wash them clean. I had a long talk with David Grigoryevich afterwards. He was right when he said that you can make anything out of a man, but what I cannot understand is—how could they have made so many scoundrels? There was one—I cannot imagine how they caught him—he looked a real criminal. Your letters are cheerful, but I know you laugh even when you are in trouble. Write and tell me about your health, and tell me more about Olenka. It will all be over soon; when I saw those Germans, I was amazed—there must have been a hundred thousand of them, I don't know how many. Do not worry about me, I am well, I am working and waiting patiently for your return, my dears."

She sat for a long time without undressing, and tears dripped silently from her eyes. Then she shuddered: "Why am I crying?" And she answered herself: "I am sorry for the people..."

* 10 *

General von Salmuth said: "Colonel Gabler is a coward, he deserves to be cashiered." But several days later, the General congratulated Gabler: "You got out of the noose in time. It was a brilliant manoeuvre"... Gabler smiled ironically; so this is what we have come to—a retreat is now regarded as a victory.

The division which Gabler commanded escaped the fate of the other divisions of the Ninth Army. It is hard to say what had saved Gabler—his coolness, or the panic which had overcome his men. Probably both; seeing the state his men were in, he, contrary to orders, hastily withdrew his division.

Of the danger that had threatened the division Richter learned from the Colonel. True, he had already heard frightful tales about Minsk and about the Bobruisk "kettle," but he had long made up his mind not to believe anything—one said that the Americans had been hurled into the sea, another said that the Reds had forced their way into East Prussia, a third asserted that the "V's" had completely wiped out London, but later, it all turned out to be mere fables. You couldn't learn anything from the newspapers—either exhortations with lots of exclamation marks, or reports of minor actions. They say the Führer has a new secret weapon up his sleeve that will decide everything; but perhaps that, too, is a fable...

It's a good thing they let us have a rest; we've had a wash and a good sleep, and now we feel a bit human. I, for example, have remembered Hilde. That's more interesting than "V's"... Only, who knows what she is doing at this moment? Cuddling her Italian, no doubt. At all events, it's good to feel that I can think about such things again...

Richter had never seen Colonel Gabler in such an excited state. The Colonel chewed the stump of his cigar and banged the table with the palm of his hand. Richter thought to himself: "I wonder whether we have landed into another kettle?"

It was Gabler who mentioned the disaster:

"It may not be as sensational as Stalingrad. Mourning has not been proclaimed.... But for us the blow is even more frightful. The Central Group has been almost completely wiped out. And we are not on the Volga.... Do you know where we are? In Poland!"

Richter said:

"I was in this village just before the war. This is where we started from..."

"I cannot congratulate you on your return. I know you are not to blame. Our men have fought splendidly.... But what would you have? ... Our victories up to nineteen forty-two were due not to the efforts of those loudmouthed fellows, but in spite of them. Even at that time they put spokes in our wheel. Now that Germany is on the verge of doom, they are venting their spite on the army..."

Richter came to the conclusion that Gabler had got into trouble with his superiors—Sergeant Engel had told him that the Colonel was being accused of cowardice. So Richter screwed up courage to say:

"When the Führer hears of this, he will understand that you saved our division."

Gabler smiled a wry smile and exposed his long, sparse teeth. The telephone rang. The Colonel picked up the receiver and immediately threw it down again with a gesture of irritation. He shouted at Richter:

"You may go!" Recovering his composure a little, he proffered his hand and said: "Sorry, I am very busy..."

Richter went out feeling dismayed: the Colonel's mood infected him. He was about to say to Sergeant Engel, his new friend, that evidently the Colonel had numerous enemies, but before he could open his mouth Engel said:

"What do you say to this? Didn't the Colonel tell you? It was announced two hours ago.... A bomb was thrown at the Führer, but he escaped unhurt."

This was so unexpected that Richter enquired:

"Who threw a bomb? The English?"

Engel snorted:

"What have the English to do with it? It was a German officer. Colonel-General Beck is implicated..."

"I don't understand..."

"Nobody understands. But I don't advise you to enquire—you can be blown up without a bomb..."

So that's why Gabler is so put out! It's scandalous! The Reds are approaching the frontiers of Germany and yet there are scoundrels who are settling accounts with the Führer! They want a repetition of nineteen eighteen.... Is it possible that a colonel-general should get mixed up with Communists? I can't make head or tail of it...."

Soon after, Richter's mind was diverted from high politics: the mail arrived. Hilde wrote that in Wernigrod "the spirit of the people is awful," that she was trying not to give way to pessimism, that she played tennis with "an architect, a nice, quiet man," and that she was waiting for Kurt to come home. Richter swore: What does she call "tennis"? I'd like to see the insolent face of that "nice, quiet architect"! Better if it were the Italian, or a banker, or a navy. There ought to be at least elementary decency: the wife of an architect ought not to carry on with another architect....

They remained in this wretched village for quite a long time. Richter involuntarily recalled the past, that night in June, Klepper's innocent eyes, Marabou's silhouette. None of his former comrades were left. Klepper was killed when they were running away from Moscow. It was very cold then, and they were feeling down in the mouth, but nobody had yet any idea of what real defeat meant. Klepper was a bit of braggart, but not a bad lad on the whole. There was a girl he dreamed of and hoped to marry, showed everybody her photograph. He had a fine house in Hamburg, that house must be gone now.... That winter Corporal Bauer was killed too. He was a nice, quiet fellow, although Marabou said that he was a traitor at heart—he was too gentle with the Russians. But it was a Russian who killed him!... Where is the logic of it? Poor Marabou, he was well-read, but he thought in abstractions; a man like that is not made for this world. He was killed when we were advancing on Kursk, he was convinced that we would get through.... That was a terrible trench battle. The Russians were simply fierce. The Russians are a queer people—kindly folks on the whole, but if you rub them the wrong way, they go mad.... Interpreter Braun said one day that Oedipus was asked a riddle: in a fight between a Russian and the Devil, who would win? Oedipus answered: "It depends upon what Devil—Russian or Prussian. If the Devil is Russian, then he may win."... Braun was killed in Rzhev. He was writing a memorandum on "The Morale of the Russians" when a mortar shell burst beside him.... Cockroach was killed when we were running away from the Desna. It's like walking in a cemetery when you think about it.... Only recently, Ginger Karl was shouting that there would be enough aspens to hang all the Reds on, but Karl is gone, he, and Oberleutnant Haase, were missing after the last retreat.

These mournful reflections were interrupted by Sergeant Engel, who came running up in great excitement with the news:

"Colonel Gabler has been arrested. General Hellwitz has arrived from Headquarters and has taken over command of the division...."

Engel was the only man whom Richter trusted. He said to him:

"But this is terrible! The Colonel led us out of the kettle. For Rzhev he received the thanks of the Führer. Can you make anything of this?..."

Engel looked at Richter with his small, cunning eyes and said:

"You can make nothing of it, or you can make too much, but that would be dangerous...."

"But still.... Do you think the Colonel is implicated in anything?..."

"I will explain it all to you as well as if I had been serving in the P.C. for three years. The old military men are reactionaries. They think the situation is critical and they want to reach an agreement with the plutocrats. They can't go and talk to the Bolsheviks, can they? ... Well, they must have a suitable atmosphere for negotiations of that kind, so they decided to get rid of those who would be a hindrance. Obviously, those are traitors, and Gabler is a traitor too...."

It was clear to Richter that Engel sympathized with the Colonel, but dared not admit it. But Engel was not important.... So Gabler was with the plotters, and that's why he was so nervous.... He is a good soldier, a typical representative of old Germany. He was right—the Americans could negotiate with the military, with the clergy, or with Brüning, but not with the Nazis.... The situation is really grave, this is evident even from the newspapers. The Americans have occupied Brittany, they will no doubt march on Paris, and the Reds are on the Vistula. And yet that lunatic is hanging German generals. Richter shuddered at the thought that he had mentally called the Führer a lunatic, but he bucked up at once: that was my opinion as far back as nineteen thirty-eight. At that time the youngsters were shouting for joy, but I told Hilde that it would end up badly. Thank God I am not a Nazi. I was compelled to fight.... I wanted to live in peace, to build houses and nothing more.... The day before yesterday it was reported that Colonel Wilke is implicated. Naturally—the Intelligence Service men know more than everybody. Incidentally, Wilke did not know anything. On the eve of the war he talked about "semi-peaceful penetration." War is like a game of dice.... The main thing now is to survive, it would be silly to die for a lost cause.

From that day on, the one thought that tormented Richter was—how to get out of this inferno. The queerest plans entered his head: accidentally wound himself in the presence of an officer so that he should not be accused of anything; report that he possessed valuable information about Gabler's treachery which he could divulge only in Berlin

after he had found an old diary he had there; desert and persuade some Polish woman to shelter him until the war was over. He realized that this was all nonsense. One day, Engel, who had owned a shoe store in Charlottenburg before the war, said:

"On the whole, we are not far from home...."

Richter fell adreaming again: perhaps all will end well—we will keep on retreating and retreating and suddenly I'll see Hilde. Let her cuddle that architect, I don't care, as long as I can get to her....

* 11 *

They walked from the river to the fields: and all the flowers of the ordinary Russian fields—humble clover, white and fragrant lungwort, bluebells, blue-eyed periwinkle, daisies, wild carnations, pimpernel, colts-foot and many others, golden, pink and violet—welcomed Sergei and Valya with the scent of summer which towards the end of a hot day drives people and bees out of their minds. Valya was so brimful of happiness that she asked nothing, said nothing, she only took Sergei's hand from time to time, as if wishing to convince herself that he was by her side, and at once dropped it again. Exceptionally radiant days have neither eyes nor memory. Valya plucked a dandelion and puffed at it.

"No, it has not all blown away...."

"What did you wish for?"

She smiled a confused smile: she herself did not know what she had wished for.

Before Sergei arrived, Valya had often asked herself: "What will our meeting be like? Perhaps we will have nothing to say to each other. For three years he has led an entirely different life. And how long had we been together?" But when Sergei came in and embraced her, everything was said—in one impulsive gesture, by the way they rushed into each other's arm.

The days of bliss seemed to pass slowly—they were uneventful, nothing important was said—and they seemed to pass too quickly. Have I really been here four days? Sergei asked himself. It was too good to be true.... Their love was jealous, hungry with longing, it was aware that separation would come again, and it gave them no opportunity to collect their thoughts; it accompanied them to the woods, caused the tall, fragrant grass to bow before them, chirped and twittered in all the keys of the feathered world, brought a bunch of flowers into Valya's tiny room and impatiently blew out the lamp.

It was not until the sixth or seventh day that Sergei began to relate what he had gone through. He smiled and said: "Do you know why I have remembered? ... It will soon be time to go back there." ... He

was afraid that Valya would not understand his incoherent story, but her senses were so exposed, she was so eager to live through what Sergei had lived through, that she could see the shell-pitted field, the dugout where Major Shileiko was sitting, and the little boat on the Dnieper. She always formed her own impressions of events and people. Once, long ago, she had said to Sergei: "The trouble with me is that I have no sense of proportion. I seem to be looking through a pair of binoculars—when I look through one end everything is near and large and when I look through the other, it is the opposite, I see a distant panorama." But now, listening to Sergei, she sensed the hardships of daily life at the front; she looked at him in amazement: I think I know him, and yet I don't know him at all... Where does he get that strength, that serenity? ...

This is what he told her:

"It was in Stalingrad, in August, or in September. There were six men in the house. The Germans were pushing forward. Our men had no water, and it was hot. They held on for five days; towards the end only two were left—Shustov and Vanya, everybody called him Vanya. Later on Major Shileiko asked: 'How did you manage to hold out?' Vanya answered: 'We are Communists, aren't we?'... Do you think it was courage? I have seen brave Germans. But what could they have answered? 'I am a German,' and that's all. That makes all the difference, and it accounts for the state they are in now. 'I am a Communist'—those words give you the courage to go to the gallows. But what's 'I am a German'? While they were conquering, those words still had a ring in them, but now they sound ridiculous, even to the Germans... This war is not like those that have been in the past. You know how I love France. I have not forgotten Paris, and never will. The flagstones. The people... No doubt there are many wonderful things in other countries too—in Spain, in Mexico, in India, everywhere. Is it that the Germans are an inferior race, or that, since a thing is ours it must be superior? Listen, Valya, this happened in Orel... Some German books were lying scattered in the road—trash, fascist propaganda and detective stories. I had a Kazakh in my battalion; he saw those books and carefully picked them up—he did not know what was in those books, but he had respect for ideas, for knowledge. That's what makes us superior... We are superior because we were the pioneers. The most difficult task is reconnoitring—and we are the reconnoitring party. That is why we are hated so much. And loved for it too... I met some foreign journalists near Minsk... No, I don't want to talk about that now, it is too disgusting... It is much pleasanter to recall that French workingman at the Roche aîné factory... Perhaps there are better-equipped factories in America, but could the workers defend the Ford plant as our men defended the Red October plant in Stalingrad? A mother will never surrender her child, and every one of us has a child in his heart—the

future, and it is not only mine, not even ours—it is the whole world's. The most beautiful thing is a bridge, to throw one across to another age..." Suddenly he laughed: "Do you see where I've got to? I am a bridge builder, so I sing in praise of bridges..."

He said that because he felt embarrassed at his own words. But Valya put her arms round him and said:

"You mustn't laugh. It's true..."

The theatrical performance in the club had been arranged long ago, before Valya had received Sergei's telegram. Now she wanted to be excused from taking part in it but Lida said: "You can't refuse. Everybody will be disappointed." Valya then begged Sergei: "Don't go. I shall not be able to act if you are there... And besides, it won't be worth your while, it is a foolish play, and I shall feel ashamed..." But Sergei insisted on going.

Valya was so agitated that she could not even make up. Lida gripped her hands in dismay and exclaimed:

"Wait! Your mouth's all crooked!"

The play was by an unknown dramatist, it was entitled: "The Girl From Staritsa." It was a crude thing, overloaded with improbable incidents and fervent monologues. Germans marched across the stage as if they were on parade, and all of them carried riding whips. Every now and again bearded partisans in silk blouses fired their rifles. A Soviet army officer dispersed the Germans and raved: "Take a smell of Russian powder, you skunks!"... Sergei sat in the front row next to the secretary of the City Party Committee and the stage manager of the local theatre: all three laughed to themselves. There were some touching passages in the play—the poetry of a man who had not much experience in writing, but the amateur actors spoke these parts in such a stodgy way that the fervent parts sounded funny.

Valya waited in torment in the wings for her turn to go on: "I will not be able to open my mouth, Seryozha is in the hall... Why did I consent? ... He will despise me..."

When she appeared on the stage Sergei forgot all the incongruities of the play. She spoke her lines with such exalted emotion that the entire audience listened spellbound. Her voice changed the meaning of the words. In the scene she was interrogated by a fat German, and she answered: "Who am I? I don't know my name. The girl from Staritsa. You ask me who prompted me to blow up the railway bridge. I spoke to the bird cherry and the honeysuckle. I went to the cemetery, my mother's grave is there. I heard a bird calling at my window in the morning. The first summer rain pattered on the roof and woke me. And so I got up and went... You may kill me, that's easy. Easier than blowing up a bridge. But tomorrow, another will come, and she will say to you: 'I am the girl from Staritsa.'..."

She stood on the stage, a picture of wrath and tenderness. The

audience cheered like mad. The stage manager said: "We must induce her to come to us."... But Sergei heard nothing, he was still living in the world of that pure voice: bird ... honeysuckle ... I went....

That night he said to Valya:

"Mama is right, Valya. You must go to Moscow. You will say that I am biased, but you saw how you affected everybody in that hall.... Why don't you want to go?"

"I am afraid I will seem far away to you...."

He took her hands and held them for a long time, kissing them.

"Valya, we have met twice—when I arrived, and this evening, when you appeared on the stage. You don't understand.... I am going to talk nonsense, as they do in that play, but don't be angry with me. When I was wounded, I was sent to the battalion hospital base. As I was lying in bed there, I thought I saw lots of stars, and I imagined I could catch one, like a firefly.... Can one tell what is far and what is near? You yourself told me before the war that one can look through both ends of a pair of binoculars.... What were those lines you wrote me?..."

"I don't remember...."

"My true love is grown to such excess.'..."

"I cannot sum up sum of half my wealth.' And indeed, Seryozhenka, I cannot...."

* 12 *

Dédé's unit had received a supply of arms as far back as the middle of July. Gustave related at the time: "An English major came down with a parachute. He told me frankly that a hitch had occurred in the Allies' operations in Normandy and so they had changed their attitude towards us partisans—that they placed their hopes in us now. I told him right out that hopes were no good, we needed arms. He said: 'I don't know what the situation is in other districts, but as far as this place is concerned, we have decided to supply arms not only to the A.S. but also to the F.T.P.' And indeed, we got arms. It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good—they are forced to mark time, but we can move now."...

Much had been done during the month: the whole region was liberated from the Germans. The latter were holding only Limoges, where they had barricaded the streets and fortified the houses. They had a strong garrison there, including many S.S. men. Gustave said: "It's high time we took Limoges, we can't wait for the Allies!..."

Major Dédé lined up the unit. Here was Charles, a grey-whiskered peasant who was fond of relating how, during the war in Spain, he had written to Blum: "I have been a Socialist for sixteen years, and I blush with shame when I read about the fate of Madrid."... Here was nineteen-year-old Givet, a merry working lad from Paris who had shot a German officer in Brive. Here was André, a miner who in nineteen forty-

three procured dynamite from the mines. Here was Manolo, a motor driver from Barcelona, who had first made acquaintance with all the concentration camps in France and later with all her maquis. Here were Czech, Pierre, Charlot, Bear and Mado. . . . The unit was six hundred strong.

They marched past villages. The peasants greeted them:

"Maquis! . . ."

And Charles would answer:

"Maquis no longer. We are marching on Limoges."

Other units—Fernand's, Bernard's and George's, were marching towards the town along other roads. Limoges was surrounded.

The Germans tried to break through to the north, fighting took place on the Paris highroad. S.S. men from the "Adolf Hitler" Division were stranded in Limoges. Manolo caught one of them and found a photograph on him—a Russian hut, snow, a half-naked girl crying. "Did you take this?" enquired Manolo. The S.S. man nodded. Manolo took the photograph to Bear. Voronov looked at it and frowned. Manolo said: "Don't grieve. He got what was coming to him." . . .

Charles had a sister living in Oradour. The Germans burnt her to death, together with her children. And Charles said: "Perhaps the Americans don't know whom they are fighting, but I do." . . .

The ring round the town closed in. The last enemy sortie was repulsed at Aix.

"We are going to storm the town tomorrow," said the partisans when they heard that Dédé had been summoned to Headquarters.

Dédé was regarded as one of the best of the partisan commanders. He was a stocky man of about forty, with keen, vivacious eyes and a protruding lower lip which lent his face an expression of indignation. He had never thought of war before the war; he would pore over his pupils' exercise books and say with pride that his school was "the most advanced in the Department." This school was not far from Limoges, but he rarely thought of it; his mind was taken up with German trains, T.N.T. and Tommy guns.

Dédé thought that Gustave had summoned him to discuss the forthcoming operation, but Gustave said:

"You will go with the others as a *parlementaire*. General Gleinitzer wants to discuss the terms of surrender."

"What terms? Let them put their hands up, and that's all. . . ."

Gustave explained that the situation was not an easy one as the Germans were in possession of artillery. A representative of the Allied Command, that same English major, was to accompany the *parlementaires*.

"The Boches don't want to surrender to us and insist on negotiating with the Allies. Well, we will put forward the Major, that's all they'll get. Let them put their hands up, and that's all there is to it. The Major

will do the talking, but you see that he does not let his tongue run away with him—he will probably think he is at a peace conference, they like that sort of thing....”

They drove to the town. On the way the Englishman said to Dédé: “We will meet the Germans on neutral territory, at the Swiss consulate. They have received a copy of the terms. I will not yield an inch.... Do you smoke? ... It will be pleasant to see a lieutenant-general of the Reichswehr compelled to talk to a real French partisan. You, no doubt, are an extreme leftist, are you not? I have never been interested in politics myself, but we have many leftists in England too, only they are moderate....”

General Gleinitzer talked to the Major; he tried to ignore the Frenchman, but happening to glance at Dédé his face flushed with anger—to think that he was sitting there calmly and couldn’t be sent to the Gestapo! ...

“I insist that the Gestapo men should be covered by the terms of surrender,” the General said.

The Englishman nodded. The General read the terms for the tenth time.

“Who is to take over the prisoners, I would prefer the A.S....”

The Englishman sighed:

“I am sorry, but we cannot guarantee that, the units are now united and constitute the so-called ‘Forces de l’Intérieurs.’ ... The partisans outnumber the A.S. by two to one....”

Dédé said to the Englishman in an undertone:

“A pity you didn’t bring a few hundred of your ‘moderate leftists’ with you. Look, the poor fellow is all of a sweat....”

The General wiped his face and the back of his neck with a silk handkerchief, read the brief ultimatum once again and said:

“Very well, I accept your terms.”

The English Major said feelingly:

“Thank you, General.”

Dédé, unable to restrain himself, said:

“It’s the partisans you have to thank, not him....”

On the way back the Major tried to excuse himself:

“Your reproach was uncalled for. That was etiquette. We know that we are indebted to you. And the Americans know it, too. General

Eisenhower said recently that the ‘Forces de l’Intérieurs’ are equal to at least fifteen Allied divisions. And it is you, mainly, who constitute the ‘Forces de l’Intérieurs.’ ...”

“At present you need us,” answered Dédé. “In the summer of nineteen forty-two, and in nineteen forty-three, you refused to supply us with arms. I am afraid that when we have expelled the Germans you will cool towards us again. It is constancy that is valued in love, isn’t that so, Major?”

The Englishman smiled: A Frenchman can't talk without passing frivolous remarks....

The entire square was filled with people. Dédé climbed on to the plinth. He spoke of the years of hardship, of the courage displayed by the people, of the maquis.

"We now recall our heroes: engine driver Paul who died in nineteen forty-one, Deveaux, Nicolas Fouger—we called him Miki—the Spaniard Jose, Désiré from Dordogne, and all those who have fallen in the cause of liberty. We recall the heroes of Stalingrad—they saved us too...."

Dédé embraced Voronov and said:

"Listen! We will name this square Stalingrad Square...."

A girl came up and kissed Voronov; he felt her tears on his cheek. He recalled Leningrad, little Mishka, Nina's hands, and his eyes grew misty—Dédé, Limoges, the clouds.

Mado said:

"Bear, if ever you meet Sergei, tell him about this day—what Dédé said, how the French girls embraced you. You remember the song Miki used to sing:

*We fain would stay with thee,
But such is fate's decree,
That we unto our death must go
Before the first cock's crow....*

"And tell him also, Bear, that Mado marched at your side...."

Flowers, a profusion of flowers, as if there had been no Oradour. no tanks, no grief—roses, gillyflowers, peonies, dahlias and lacphiol. Mado held a bunch of red roses. Her mind was a blank, she remembered nothing, she tried not to look into the future. Rare hours occur in life when happiness is diffused in the air, and when a man, freed from memory, from thoughts, from everything that makes him strong, and weak, simply gazes, breathes and smiles.

"You will see Barcelona again, Manolo," said Mado.

Dédé will go back to his school. Czech will repair watches again. Bear will go to Leningrad. The hour has come when people board trains, wave their hands, press flowers to their lips.... And Mado buried her face in the roses. She recalled the railway station, the car window, Sergei.... No, she must not think! Givet came running up to her:

"It's just come over the radio, France!... An insurrection has broken out in Paris. Almost the whole city is liberated...."

Mado flung her arms around Givet. Paris, dear Paris. barricades, fighting, chestnut trees, that bench!...

Lancier had become unbearable: he would sigh and sob at one moment, and at another, vow that he had never been so happy in his life; suddenly, in an empty room, he would begin to deliver fervid speeches, and then he would drop down on a couch and say he had a heart attack and demand that Dr. Morillot be called at once, otherwise he would die; an hour later he would get up and dash out of the house.

Marthe could stand it no longer and burst into tears. This surprised Lancier—it seemed to him that his wife did not realize what was going on; then he felt touched by her tears and began to comfort her.

"Perhaps all will end well. But if not, we will die together. . . ."

"Do you think I am afraid of bombs, or guns? It is you I am worried about; sometimes it seems to me that you are going out of your mind."

"I am not going out of my mind—it's the world. I am a Cartesian, I love logic. But there is no sense in what's going on, it's madness! . . ."

Two days before Pinaud had been to see him; grunting cheerfully he said:

"Herriot is in Paris, that's absolutely certain. Laval summoned him. Negotiations are going on for the formation of a new Cabinet. An American representative has visited Pétain twice. They are forming a Cabinet now. The Americans are recommending Blum, Herriot or Chautemps. There are some lunatics among the Germans who want to hold Paris at all cost, but Abetz is taking a sober view of the situation. . . . I am optimistic—the Americans are also interested in preventing the Communists from coming in, that means, we have some point of contact. Laval said to Herriot: 'I suited the Germans, you suit the Americans, a change has taken place in the theatre of war, consequently, we must change places.' . . . He's no fool, eh?"

Since the spring Lancier had been living in constant fear. True. Pinaud had assured him that Algiers understood the position of the industrialists who had been obliged to collaborate with the Germans, but how much does Algiers count? Lancier asked himself. Algiers is far away; the Communists with their "black lists" are only round the corner. To them, I am a traitor. They are fanatics, they don't reason, it is enough to recall Lejean. It is possible to talk to them when everything is quiet and the police are in their place, when those Asiatics are not handling revolvers. I am sorry for Lejean. I don't know what has happened to him, but he will not be sorry for me. I am firmly convinced of that. . . .

After Pinaud's visit, Lancier's face beamed. Laval is a rascal, of course, but he knows the rules of the parliamentary game. The Marshal is an honest Frenchman, that has always been my opinion. The Amer-

icans are, above all, businessmen, they want order. How lucky we are that Germany lies between us and the Russians! I can just imagine what would happen if the Red Cossacks were to come here. . . . The Germans will hand Paris over to the Americans, that will be a real celebration. And Lancier called out:

"Marthe, come here! . . . I'll tell you something that is very important. Only you must not speak about it to anybody else. What's the date today? The sixteenth? The Americans will be here before the first, and Louis will come with them, do you understand? . . ."

But Morillot turned up that morning and said:

"Herriot has been arrested. Laval has fled to Belfort. No newspapers are coming out—all the pen-pushers are scuttling away. The Germans are determined to put up a fight. So prepare for fireworks."

Lancier squealed:

"What are you laughing at? This is a tragedy! . . ."

"I didn't know that a crackling noise frightens you. Maurice."

"Nothing frightens me, I fought at Verdun. But can't you realize what will happen if the Communists come out in the streets? . . . The police are on strike. . . . There will be a frightful massacre. . . ."

"I am afraid that at the last moment the Germans will reach an agreement with the Americans. You say the Communists will come out in the streets. It will be a good thing if they do. There is so much filth in these streets that only blood can wash it away—June nineteen forty, four years with the Germans, ingratiating smiles, profits, defiant gestures when nobody can see. . . ."

Lancier glared so fiercely at Morillot that the latter staggered back.

"Calm yourself, Maurice! . . ."

But Lancier did not hear:

"You want my blood? All right, butcher me, but say right out that you are a Communist!"

Morillot drew some tablets from his pocket:

"Take these, Maurice, they will calm you at once. . . ."

"I don't want to be calm, I am a Frenchman, I am suffering for France! . . ."

Nevertheless, he took a tablet, lay down on the couch and dozed.

He woke up with a heavy head. It was dark in the room—there was no electricity. Nor was the radio working. Perhaps the Americans are already nearing Paris? Or perhaps the massacre has commenced? Nothing is known. . . . He spent the evening and the whole night in torment. Next morning he decided to go out and see what was doing in the city. It seemed to him that he was still asleep. Or perhaps Marthe was right—he had gone crazy? . . . German motor trucks were dashing along the streets loaded with furniture, trunks, machines and crates. Suddenly his eye caught the United States flag stuck on a housefront, and next to it the Soviet hammer and sickle. . . . And next to that an old poster:

"Celebration of the third anniversary of Europe's proclamation of war against Bolshevism."... Scarcely two months have passed.... I wonder what Nivelle is doing now? He has probably crawled under his bed.... This thought suddenly made Lancier feel cheerful. After all, it is pleasant to think that the Boches are getting to hell out of here! They have tortured me enough: one moment it was—why was I in partnership with Léo? and at another—where is Louis? Louis will no doubt turn up with the Allies. Perhaps Mado is with them too?... Awful to think that Marceline did not live to see this happy day, she always hated the Boches. When the Americans come I'll have a good talk with that fellow Roy.... Why, the French flag is flying over the Town Hall! And the Germans are not shooting, that's surprising!... It looks as if Paradise is returning.... Lancier walked along with a springy step, the effect of his unusual cheerfulness. Suddenly, he caught sight of a manifesto posted on a wall. He went up to read it.

"We, the representatives of Paris ... call upon the people of the Metropolis and its suburbs to rise in arms.... Anglo-Soviet-American fighting alliance.... Our great city Paris.... Marcel Cachin, Maurice Thorez, Jacques Duclos...." Lancier walked away and covered his eyes with his hand. There are no Americans.... It's the Communists! What was I so glad about? The Germans got on my nerves; these fellows will slaughter me....

Then he began to comfort himself: Only words, who attaches importance to them? Here comes a tank, it is German, they call these "Panthers." The Americans have good tanks, too. But what have the Communists got? Leaflets, that's all. They don't frighten me.

It was an unbearably hot day. Once upon a time, Paris used to be deserted at this season: everybody went to the seaside, or into the country. Lancier used to stroll in the grounds of Gelinotte.... Lord, it's hot! The asphalt is soft underfoot. He took his hat off and wiped his perspiring brow for a long time. He was thirsty, so he sat down on the terrace of a small café and ordered a mineral water; he recalled the Loire, Marceline, Mado's landscapes. A German motor truck halted outside the café. Three soldiers got out and busied themselves with a wheel. Several young people appeared, heaven knows from where. Before Lancier could collect his thoughts, the Germans were lying on the pavement. In the sunlight the blood looked unnatural, greasy, like oil paint. The young people clambered into the truck and began to unload the tommy guns that were in it. Among them was a young woman; her golden hair was ruffled by the wind. That face is familiar to me, thought Lancier. Somehow, he did not seem to realize that this was war, or who the woman was. Then he dashed towards her, but he was too late—she vanished with the others round the corner. Who would have thought that Léontine was capable of firing a tommy gun? She used to be fond of dancing, was full of fun, like Léo, and had never interested herself in poli-

tics. Yes, but she has a reason. . . . She had always loved Léo. Marceline used to say: "She has a big heart." . . . I can understand her fighting, it is even noble on her part. She looks inspired, positively like a portrait by Delacroix. There is beauty in such madness. Only there are no more artists now—we are living in a different age, everything has coarsened. . . . It's an awful pity I could not catch up with her and grip her hand. . . . Taken on the whole, I behaved badly towards Léo. After all, I promised to help him. It was silly to make that promise—what could I do? The Boches wouldn't have paid any attention to what I said. Would Léo have been better off if they had sent me somewhere to hell, too? Dumas made a lot of noise, and see what happened to him. It was absurd. . . . It is different with these people—they killed Germans and took their arms. They must have connections with the Allies. It is ridiculous to think that Léontine could become a Communist.

Shots rang out again. Pedestrians started running, Lancier ran too. This time Germans were shooting. Lancier ran past several streets and then stopped, he felt frightened—he remembered the fresh blood on the slate-coloured asphalt. I might have been killed too, very easily. The wind that had refreshed the city for several minutes died down. The heat became even more oppressive. Lancier barely managed to drag himself home. He said to Marthe:

"I don't understand a thing. The Communists are calling for an insurrection. And yet I saw Léontine—that's Alpert's wife—with a tommy gun. American flags. . . . I think the Communists want to get into favour with the people—collect votes for future elections, but I think it is childish. The Boches are clearing out, but there are no signs of haste, they must have reached an agreement—they will go finally when the Americans reach Paris. . . ."

In the evening Morillot dropped in. Lancier told him about Léontine. Morillot was not surprised:

"I knew she was in Paris, I treated her in the spring. . . . Well, Maurice, it has really started now. The Paris Committee of Liberation has proclaimed an insurrection. I have been mobilized as a surgeon—I will dress wounds. . . ."

"Who mobilized you, the Americans?"

"Colonel Roll, a Frenchman, a boilermaker. Incidentally, he worked for Bertie for two years."

"Is he . . . a Communist?"

"Of course."

Morillot coughed, laughed and rubbed his hands.

"Afterwards everything will be put in its place. But do you understand, Maurice, it's good to see decent people in the street at least once in your life, people who are doing decent work! . . ."

Lancier felt too weak to argue; he merely asked Morillot to give him "another of those tablets." He soon fell asleep, but it was a troubled

sleep; he shouted, Marthe found it difficult to wake him. She stood over him, half-dressed, shaking him, and herself shaking with fear.

"God, how you screamed!"

"I had a horrible dream. . . ."

He could not tell Marthe that he had dreamed about Léontine. She stood, with ruffled hair, slowly raising her tommy gun and taking aim at him. There was not another soul around—there was only a slate-coloured, stony field, drenched with crimson blood.

* 14 *

At night a thunderstorm broke over the city, but it failed to clear the air. Sunday was such a sultry day that on entering the dimly lit laundry where Major Luc's C.P. was situated, the insurgents sighed with relief: for a few moments, at least, they would be in the cool shade.

In the West End of the city it was an ordinary Sunday. Early in the morning servant girls took pet dogs out for a walk. Then ladies dressed in black and carrying prayer books appeared. The flower women sold pansies and gillyflowers. Girl cyclists glided noiselessly past, astonishing loungers by their eccentric coiffeurs and bare calves on which stocking seams were traced. The garbage cans outside the houses had not been emptied and the stench marred the pleasure of the Sunday stroll; on top of this, rumours were afloat that the Communists were capturing the municipal buildings and killing people whom they called traitors. Respectable people sighed: if only the Americans would come soon!

On the banks of the Seine imperturbable anglers were sitting, inspired by the same old unrealizable dream of catching a gudgeon; they were philosophers, and they had a lot to meditate over on that long, sabbath day.

The poor quarters of the city presented a different picture. The houses were decorated with flags. The walls were plastered with the appeals of different committees. The café owners had closed their establishments for fear there would be shooting. Groups of partisans appeared and disappeared; some of them carried tommy guns or rifles. Sometimes a German armoured car passed. Every now and again shots were heard.

The laundry was situated in a deep yard, its windows faced two streets, in the event of a raid it would be easy to escape. Lejean heard what the men who came to see him had to say and issued orders:

"Occupy the Town Hall. . . . Roget must have machine guns, otherwise he will be unable to carry out his assignment. . . . Post snipers near the railway station—motor trucks pass there. . . . How many bottles have you? . . ."

The insurgents now possessed a fairly large quantity of tommy guns and also some machine guns: they had captured two truckloads of arms the day before. But what could they do against tanks? . . . They needed plenty of bottles. The day before Lejean had sent a message to Fernand: "We've got fuel, let us have some sulphuric acid." . . . The partisans called the bottles "Russian Cocktails"—they all knew that this weapon had been successfully employed on the Eastern Front.

"I have laid out two Boches," said Léontine.

Lancier was right—her face shone as if she were inspired. For the first time she was able to express all that she had pondered over, all that she had suffered, and to express it in the language of fire—there was no other language in which such emotions could be expressed. She remembered that bright autumn day on which she had met Léo for the last time. He said then: "Somebody promised to put me in touch with the partisans. I want to shoot. Do you know why? . . . Because I have known happiness . . . with you. . . ." Léo was taken. He was too trustful. . . . All through the winter and the spring Léontine had searched for the people whom her husband had failed to find. At the end of May, Dr. Morillot put her in touch with a student. She carried leaflets. At last her hour had come: she was sitting in judgment on those who had wrecked her happiness. . . . Rob, little Rob, he was suffocated by the smoke, she is rocking him in her arms. . . . "Madame, he must be buried." . . . "Vallervallera." . . . "Is this your husband? He is not an Aryan." . . . Paris has risen in revolt, and the whirlwind of insurrection, as old as the streets of this city, had swept up the little grisette whom Léo had called in jest "a flower of the Paris pavements."

General von Scholtitz, the Commander of the German garrison, was exceedingly depressed by what was taking place. He had received orders to ensure a free passage for the Seventh Army through Paris. He had a force of twenty thousand men under his command, including numerous S.S. troops, eighty tanks and aircraft. He could cope with the Paris mob. . . . But politics had intervened. It was difficult to understand what the chiefs wanted. General von Scholtitz knew how to fight and obey orders, but he knew nothing about diplomacy. He had done his best to check the Americans—he had commanded an Army Corps, and it was not his fault that the German forces at Saint-Lô were defeated. . . . But the Führer was displeased and had sent him to clear up the mess in Paris. When he was asked whether he intended to wreck the city he answered: "I am only a little general, I obey orders." He was a sick man, suffered from angina pectoris, but he could have lived another twenty years in spite of this, were it not for this accursed war. . . .

"Paris is a cosy city," said the General to the French people, "but you have a lot of bums and terrorists here." . . . Only a few days ago everything had been clear: we were not to defend the city and the Americans were not to storm it—an agreement had been arrived at to that

effect; we were to leave when the Americans reached the suburbs. Who stood to gain by an interregnum? Only the Communists. . . . Why on earth does the Führer now want me to blow up the bridges and defend the city to the last? . . . They want to send a hundred and fifty "Great Germany" tanks. They have simply gone mad! This is not nineteen forty-two, and I don't intend to play the part of von Paulius. There has been quite enough blundering! . . . We must play for time. . . .

This explains why General von Scholtitz was negotiating with Herr Nordling. He was a respectable man, the Swedish Consul, and the representative of the S.K.F. ball-bearing company. The General had a feeling, of course, that the Swede sympathized with the Allies; that was unkind of him—a Nordic should sympathize with Germany. But the Swedes always backed two horses, and the situation now was such that one could not be squeamish—better Herr Nordling than the Communists. Germany's last hope was that the Allies would realize what a menace the Bolsheviks were and would not allow the Reds to enter Germany. Paris must not be destroyed. That would make agreement impossible. . . .

Herr Nordling proposed that an armistice be concluded. That was humiliating, of course, but it was better than opening a new front in Paris. The more so that the main thing was to ensure a free passage for the Seventh Army. General von Scholtitz enquired:

"But with whom do you want me to conclude an agreement? I cannot negotiate with bums, terrorists, Communists. . . ."

The General pronounced the word "Communists" with a disdainful drawl. Herr Nordling reassured him:

"Not with Communists, with representatives of the Algiers government, quite respectable people. If you were a Frenchman, Herr General, you would join de Gaulle. . . ."

Von Scholtitz made no reply, he was thinking of his own point—play for time, gain at least a week.

Léontine and her comrades were in the street when a loudspeaker, flying the French tricolour, drove past announcing:

"The Provisional Government of the French Republic and the National Council of Resistance order you to cease all hostilities against the forces of occupation until the city is completely evacuated."

Léontine enquired:

"That means, there must be no more shooting?"

"Who signed that order? . . . What skunks! . . ."

"Munichites! . . ."

"We'll keep on fighting the Boches just the same. . . ."

"Let's go and see Luc, we'll hear what he says first. . . ."

They did not find Luc, he was at Headquarters.

Some Germans drove past. They were grinning. One truck was loaded with machine guns and another with a piano, statuettes, a quilt. And the Parisians looked and laughed. The cafés were crowded. Every-

thing had passed off quietly—the thing now was to wait for the Americans. . . .

Lancier, his mind at rest now, was strolling with Marthe. He complained of the heat, but he was happy: after all, the French are French. Descartes was a Frenchman, naturally, we love logic! . . .

At that moment Lejean was addressing a meeting of the Committee of the National Front. He was saying:

"Their aim is obvious: to keep the people out of it. But this is not nineteen forty. . . . We must not allow three German divisions to pass through Paris. The Allies may be ready to betray us, but we will not betray the Allies. I propose. . . ."

The chairman read the resolution:

"... We denounce the armistice as a stab in the back of Paris which has been heroically fighting the invaders for two days and nights." . . .

There was shooting in the street: the loudspeaker had not convinced everybody.

Lejean was in the printing office supervising the urgent job of printing the Party's manifesto: "We are opposed to the armistice—it means the surrender of Paris. . . . Forward, Paris! Death to the Boches! . . ."

Next day a meeting was held. Among those present were the initiators of the armistice. One of them—a French general—said:

"We have concluded a gentleman's agreement with von Scholtitz. . . ."

Lejean interrupted him:

"Perhaps you have forgotten with whom the English concluded a gentleman's agreement at one time? It was with Mussolini. . . . If you intend to keep to the armistice, the F.T.P. will fight alone. . . . Incidentally, this will scarcely affect the numbers of the insurgents. . . ."

General von Scholtitz pricked up his ears in surprise: shooting. Bums, no matter what Herr Nordling may call them. . . .

Colonel Roll issued orders to cover the city with barricades. Girls lugged sandbags; on the embankments and boulevards the chestnut and plane trees were felled; iron beds and stoves were dragged out of the houses; the iron railings round the parks were torn down and the cobblestones in the roads were dug up. Every city has its traditional word: Paris revived—it heard its word: "barricades." Like the workingmen in blouses in June eighteen forty-eight, like the Federates during the Commune, the workers at Renault and the actresses of the Comédie Française, school-children and veterans of the first world war, underground fighters and simple grisettes, students and aged women—all frantically built barricades. Perhaps these obstacles would not withstand artillery, perhaps there were too many of them, and not all were properly built—but Paris needed them, as it needed eyes, a voice—they expressed all that inspired that ancient city—its passion, its wrath, its heartache.

It was in the Boulevard Saint-Germain near Saint-Michel. A tank moved forward very slowly. Were it not for the clatter, Léontine would have thought it was standing still. Behind followed another tank, a smaller one. Léontine was standing at the entrance to a courtyard. She had chosen this place because there was a barricade here; the tank would certainly have to stop. It seemed to her that she had been here many hours. Her heart throbbed, and in spite of the clatter, her ears rang with the music of the accordion in the little dancing place in which she had danced with Léo when they became acquainted:

*My love, my love, don't hurt it, it will fly,
Flames will shoot to the sky. . .*

The tank stopped. An angry German popped his head out of the turret. Léontine hurled the bottle. Somebody on the top floor shouted: "It's burning! . . ." Shots rang out. The second tank passed on. Léontine sank to the pavement; it looked as though she were sitting with her back to the wall, her head drooped on her breast, her hair was slightly ruffled by the wind.

People came running out of the house. All they found in Léontine's pocket was the brief note Léo had sent her from Drancy (she had worn it on her chest, like a talisman): "Léontine, my love, I have lived and will die with your name on my lips." Somebody wrote on the wall with charcoal: "Here died Léontine, who set fire to a German tank." Then stretcher-bearers carried Léontine away. One of them said she was still alive, the other said nothing.

Dr. Morillot hastened up to her, but at once stepped away. He had long been accustomed to death, and during these days he had seen girls who had been shot and infants who had been killed; but he had a special feeling for Léontine—the scoffing, but simple girl; he had often thought to himself: she might have been my daughter. . . . All these days Morillot had been frightfully busy, running to treat the wounded under fire, climbing to attics and descending into basements. There had been lots of wounded—insurgents and idle onlookers; Morillot had not known that illusory armistice that had alarmed some and had comforted others: firing went on, on the part of the Germans and of the partisans. He had thought neither of his own life nor of the future, when the Germans will have been expelled; he had rejoiced at the rejuvenation of Paris. But now, when they brought Léontine in, her eyes already glassy, her hair now uselessly golden, he felt a sudden pang—perhaps because he recalled the death of Pierre (no doubt René had perished too), or because he was terrified at the thought that the best were passing away and only the rascals would be left. Frowning, he dressed the wound of an old woman who kept wailing: "I had nothing to do with them, doctor. I was going to the baker's." . . .

Firing again broke out in the Boulevard Saint-Germain. Outside the house where Léontine was killed lay a bunch of dahlias—somebody had read the inscription on the wall and had placed the flowers there. The dahlias soon withered—the day was dry and hot.

* 15 *

Before the war Sembat had said to Lejean: "If there's a fight, we'll see." . . . In the winter he had been invited to join an underground group, but he refused. "What good am I as a conspirator?" he said. "I am too talkative. . . . And besides, you say 'organize,' but I don't know how. When it starts—I shall be at your service." . . . When he heard the first shot he looked round his studio as if it did not belong to him. He kicked a stool over for some reason, and went to join the insurgents.

He was a good shot; he was given a rifle; he climbed into attics and on to roofs and sniped Germans. He was happy: for the first time for many a long year he was free from doubt, from divided feelings. Burly and cheerful, he felt in his element among people who swore lustily, ate their bread with relish, chased Germans out of the houses, joked, rushed at tanks with bottles, sang sentimental love songs and ran into a blood-drenched square as if it were a lawn. And Sembat was liked by his comrades. A young girl happened to say to him: "You are like a hippopotamus," so they called him Hippo. They were all amused at the agile way in which clumsy Hippo clambered over sloping roofs.

On hearing the report about the armistice, Sembat said dispassionately "nothing doing," and took aim at a truck driver.

Funny, he mused, Nivelle called the Germans Siegfrieds. All right, let them be Siegfrieds. But we are giving them hell now—we mechanics, seamstresses, the artist Sembat, alias Hippo. . . . There is great strength inherent in the people, and one can live all one's life and never see it; it is like a volcano that has been proclaimed extinct; they build a funicular railway, and a restaurant for tourists, with a telescope and comfortable armchairs, and suddenly—bang! . . . A pity I can't take a shot at Nivelle; I suppose the louse has crept into a crack. . . .

The Germans were now holding on at five or six points; these were islands, and a tank set out on a stormy voyage from one island to another. The streets were still crowded. Cyclists carried newspapers to the newsvendors: *l'Humanité*, *Ce Soir*, *Libération*. Now and again the Germans tried to pass to the offensive and attacked municipal or government buildings that were held by partisans. For three hours Sembat fought in the Place de Saint-Michel and then near the Town Hall in District Five. "A conspicuous target," he said laughing, pointing to himself. . . .

Street fighting was going on for the fifth day. A large German

column was moving across the Champs Elyssées. It was fired at. Tanks opened fire with their guns. One tank caught fire. There was fighting also in Belleville, near the Gare Austerlitz and in the ancient narrow streets in the Quarter du Bissy. Fighting also went on at night. In the sultry darkness a challenge is heard:

"Who goes there?"

"F.F.I."

"The mob has taken possession of the streets," whisper the frightened inhabitants of Passy and Auteuil; they burn portraits of Pétain, German permits, and notebooks. And even in the Resistance, those who had expressed themselves in favour of an armistice were alarmed; some bewailed the possibility that the Germans may destroy the ancient monuments, while others openly said: "The Communists must not be allowed to take possession of Paris."...

"Where are the Americans?" Lancier asked Marthe for the hundredth time.

"Where are the Americans?" exclaimed General von Scholtitz irritably.

Herr Nordling said to the General:

"If you give me a pass, I will go to Eisenhower's Headquarters with Count Saint-Fal."

The word "Count" reassured von Scholtitz: a Count could not be a Communist.

"Very well, I'll let you have a pass..."

In the evening of the twenty-fourth of August the radio announced: "French tanks are entering Paris." Hundreds of thousands of Parisians stood in the streets and smiled, although nobody could see their smiles in the dark.

Lejean did not smile:

"The Germans are attacking the Town Hall in the Eleventh District. Send two hundred men with machine guns at once!..."

Sembat rushed into the building and dragged out a German captain. The latter had his hands on the top of his head. Sembat looked at him closely: he was tall, thin, and had the long, sharp face of a fanatic; it suddenly occurred to Sembat: Greco would have painted him well... After that Sembat did not think of anything, he cheered until he was hoarse, hugged girls, old men and partisans with prickly cheeks, and rejoiced as only a middle-aged man can rejoice when he has thrown off the weight of years.

"They have surrendered!..."

"Long live liberty!..."

Gaston Roy stepped up to the little window that looked out on the Boulevard Port Royal and listened. The loudspeaker was bawling:

"Terms of surrender agreed to between Colonel Roll, Commander of the F.F.I. Ile-de-France, and Divisional General Leclerc, Commander

of the Second L.B. on the one part, and General von Scholtitz, Commander of the German forces in the Paris area. . . .”

Roy was stranded in Paris: he had been misled by Colonel von Schlieffer, who had told him that there was no danger. Von Schlieffer had left Paris a week ago. Roy roamed about the city. He did not dare go home, he was afraid the Communists were bossing it there already. He hid in the servants' room in the attic. He had papers on him made out to Gaston Duquesnes, an electrician. But only one thought filled his mind: death. During the first days of the insurrection he still clung to hope: the Germans had numerous tanks, in Bourget they had at least fifty aircraft; they had only to drop a few bombs and send the tanks out, and this rabble would scatter. . . . But von Scholtitz turned out to be a rag. The Germans must indeed be at the end of their tether to conclude an agreement with the partisans. Fancy surrendering to one of those rascals! It was obvious that Colonel Roll was not a Colonel, nor was his name Roll. . . . There was nothing to hope for now. . . . I may be recognized in the street by any passer-by; I have addressed public meetings. He peered into a small mirror that hung over the chest of drawers, and the pale, expressionless face with the small moustache that he saw in it seemed to him to be unique, unlike any other face. No, he would not be able to hide. . . .

He drew out his revolver. I must shoot myself, that is the simplest thing to do. . . . Others have been wiser. They can hang out flags and sleep peacefully, although they have collaborated with the Germans and made much more money than I. . . . Pinaud must be cheering Colonel Roll now. It will take two or three months, or perhaps six, before it is found out that, through me, he bought a Jew's house for next to nothing, and in the meantime passion will die down. Pinaud will prove that he contributed four sous to the Resistance, or that he had sheltered some frightened chatterbox for a night, and will get out of trouble. But I must perish, God knows what for. As if I am interested in their damned politics! I was interested in business and in nothing else. If I spoke in praise of the Führer, or abused Jews, it was only because I worked in a German organization. . . .

He stepped to the window again and looked out. Down below people were exulting. He thought with disgust: it's all right for them. . . . The cheering, the singing and the flags made him feel sick. Suddenly shots rang out; the people ran helter-skelter. Roy saw two persons being picked up—a woman, and a young man wearing a brassard. He stretched out on the bed and smoked cigarette after cigarette. He stepped to the window again. He was like a somnambulist—he acted semi-consciously, but with extraordinary precision. He did not miss. The girl who was cheering beneath the window fell flat on the ground. Again the people scattered. Roy stood by the door and listened. Some people were mounting the stairs. He went out on to the landing and shot one of them; he

wanted to fire again but before he could do so his head hung over the bannister and blood dripped from his mouth.

The rejoicing in the street continued. The people burned portraits of Hitler, hugged and kissed each other, applauded. The girls in Sembat's unit took him by the arms and scanned the words:

"Our Hip-po! Our Hip-po! . . ."

And he shouted: "pot-a-mus!" and his stentorian voice caused everybody to look round.

Dr. Morillot ran in to see Lancier for a moment:

"Congratulations, Maurice!"

Lancier embraced him and said tearfully:

"How awful that Marceline did not live to see this. . . . Has there been a lot of shooting in your quarter?"

"I don't think so. . . . I have hardly been home. I have been tending the wounded. . . . Léontine was killed. . . ."

Lancier recalled how Léontine ran towards that motor truck and how her hair streamed in the wind. Sadness overcame him: he realized that he would never be able to say: I wanted to help Léo, it was those Boches' fault. . . . Aloud he said, to comfort himself:

"How awful! But what a glorious death! . . . Like it was at Verdun. I did not think the young people were capable of anything like that. Léo can be proud of her. . . . Will Léo come back, do you think?"

"Come back from where? The other world?"

"Why do you always pile the colours on? He is not in the first freshness of youth, of course, but he has a strong constitution, and I am sure he will hold out. . . ."

In reply, Morillot made a gesture of resignation. Lancier thought of Louis.

"Did you see our forces come in? Were there any airmen among them? . . ."

"No, only tankists. . . ."

"I heard de Gaulle's speech. He spoke beautifully—about the unity of all Frenchmen. I can see now that I was mistaken in many things. . . . But what would you have? The Germans deceived us. It turns out that the Communists are playing only a secondary role. . . ."

Morillot smiled a mournful smile:

"I have seen Colin's cartoon—two insurgents shooting in different directions and underneath the dates: 1789, 1830, 1848, 1871, 1944. The censor suppressed it. . . . You need feel no alarm, Maurice; the people have achieved victory, but it is a victory for a day—to give them the chance to sing and cheer. And after that. . . ." He paused for a moment and then said: "You were always angry with me for laughing at things, Maurice. But let me tell you, I don't think I will laugh any more. . . ."

Sembat went up to his studio. He looked with surprise at the canvases and at the easel as if he had blundered into a strange room. Every-

thing reminded him of that torment which people in books call the "pangs of authorship." It was a big studio, but he felt cramped in it, his life was too cramped for him.

He stepped to the window. He lived high up, and he had a view of the street, the houses and the tiled roofs—he had shot from roofs like those. The chimney pots on the roofs appeared to him like an assembly of gnomes conferring with each other. The sun went down. How many times had he watched this scene? But now, after the fighting, the blood and death, after that moment of serene triumph, Paris moved him deeply. It is not even a city, it is a forest of brick. Other cities had been built according to a plan, with straight streets, clear and bare, like a theorem. But here, the houses had grown up like trees, house was stuck to house. Every century, every generation had left its imprint upon those bricks. Bricks impregnated with smoke, corroded by the dampness of the sea, bricks that have withstood the storms of ages. It is easy to write an article—what is needed to do that?—a head, ideas, a pen. But a novel cannot be written according to a plan, one must live through a novel. And that's what Paris is—a long, intricate novel. . . .

Sembat stood long in the greyish-lilac twilight and kept repeating: Paris! . . . My Paris! . . .

* 16 *

Nivelle had begun to cool off towards the Germans long ago; he himself did not realize to what degree his attitude had been influenced by the war communiqués. Already a year ago he wrote in his diary: "There is nothing in common between an intellectual hierarchy and the jackboot tyranny of soldiery."—that was after the Germans had been defeated at Kursk. When Italy surrendered, Nivelle made the following entry: "Another step towards the climax. I am now thinking that a clean cause needs clean hands. The dictatorship of the mind is not the 'new order.'"

He wanted to retire from the game; he said to himself: I have made many blunders, it was silly of me to write for the newspapers, I am a poet, not a politician. I stand for an idea. How can I be answerable for the way that idea has been applied by German quartermasters, or by the Gestapo?

Among the officials in the Prefecture there were some who were connected with the de Gaulleists. Nivelle guessed that and tried to get into these people's confidence, but in vain; no sooner did he begin to criticize the occupational authorities than the man he spoke to either broke off the conversation or defended the Germans.

In the spring, Nivelle met Lancier and invited him to a café. The conversation obviously made Lancier uneasy. Nivelle abused the Germans, while Lancier glanced round furtively, afraid of being seen with Nivelle.

"I am very glad to note that the industrialists are beginning to turn

towards the national principle," said Nivelle. "I have been told that Pinaud..."

Lancier suddenly interrupted him and with childish candour enquired:

"Aren't you afraid of the Allies coming?"

Nivelle was indignant:

"I don't understand your question. Perhaps you don't like the fact that I am serving at the Prefecture, but I don't own a factory, or Corbeille. Poetry doesn't provide bread and butter."

"But you..."

"In nineteen forty-one I welcomed the war against Bolshevism. That's true. But even at that time this did not mean that I welcomed the Reich's war against the Western powers. I am not a journalist, I am a poet, and nothing but a poet... I cannot be answerable for the way various charlatans have made political use of my metaphors. Do you remember the conversation we had three years ago about André Gide's diaries in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*? Would anybody dare reproach him for having admired the wisdom of Hitler? André Gide is now in Algiers, and the de Gaulleists are proud of him. That is natural—the Muses enjoy right of ex-territoriality. I am not afraid of forthcoming events, I look forward to them..."

Lancier got up, complained of a pain in the liver and hastily walked out. Nivelle sat and reflected: Even Lancier thinks that I am connected with the Germans... I played a very minor role, and that's exactly why they are thirsting for my blood. Pinaud and the other industrialists will get away with it. They need a scapegoat... They will sacrifice the poet...

Nivelle had a stroke of luck. An old acquaintance, Colonel von Hallenberg, came to his rescue: he gave him a permit to leave for Switzerland. This was on the second of June—several days before the Allies landed. As he crossed the frontier Nivelle reflected: at least for once, the Goddess of Reason saved a priest of unreason!...

He found himself in a tiny village high up on the shore of Lake Geneva. Here he found a cheap boarding house. He denied himself everything, he even gave up smoking—the French francs that he managed to take with him were almost worthless here. In two or three months I will find myself on the streets...

The Geneva journalist Sénot, on learning of Nivelle's arrival, thought there was a political manoeuvre behind this. Nivelle greeted him affably, but told him at once:

"I am a poet, nothing but a poet. I am happy to be in the country which has always provided an asylum for anchorites and dreamers. I am now working on a book of verse to be entitled *l'Octaèdre de mon âme*..."

The journalist enquired:

"You have written in defence of the 'authoritarian regime,' have you not?"

"Never! I have written in defence of authorities. You must not forget the tragic situation my country was in after the *débâcle*. One of my spiritual mentors bravely stated during that terrible time: 'It is not cowardice to seek agreement with yesterday's enemy, but wisdom.'... I was deceived by the appeal to defend western civilization from Bolshevism. I am still an opponent of the Reds, but if you intend to write about my humble self, don't forget to emphasize that—first of all I am a Frenchman. You no doubt know, that the judge on the portals of Gothic cathedrals always faces the West. I too have a judge—my conscience, and it gazes calmly at the green waters of the Atlantic...."

Nivelle reflected bitterly: I have to think about every centime; dull, philistine conversation at the dinner table; wretched little magazines—they have accepted only two of my poems.... He said to himself: I must hold out for two or three years. A collision between the West and Communism is inevitable. The internal situation in France is only one of the cards in the game, and perhaps not a big card.... All decent Frenchmen will, of course, welcome de Gaulle with delight, he guessed who the future victors would be. Pétain regards him as a worthy successor. But for a time de Gaulle must tolerate the Communists, as the Allies are tolerating Moscow.... If I had money I would wait until my hour came, but it looks as though the poet will have to hurl himself into the abyss....

During one of his melancholy strolls along the shore of the lake he casually made the acquaintance of an American woman, Mary Low. Mary had spent two years in Paris and was there when the war broke out. She had been unable to leave in time, she was sick, and she found refuge in a luxurious hotel on the shore of Lake Geneva. The daughter of a big cotton grower, she was brought up in the delta of the Mississippi, among the cotton plantations, Negroes and patriarchal ennui. Her father, who had early become a widower, doted on his only daughter and forgave her all her caprices. He was grieved by the fact that Mary did not marry, but he blamed himself for this: I didn't bring her up properly, but what could I do in this godforsaken hole?... Mary went to New York, and later to Europe. In Paris she was taken up with the Surrealists and the fashionable dressmakers, read the works of Joyce, took psychoanalysis treatment, but did not marry. Perhaps it was because she found no one willing to marry her—she was not distinguished for her beauty. When Nivelle set eyes on her he exclaimed inwardly: What a fright! She had a heavy jaw and red hair, combed high, and looked as if she were suffering from plica. She dressed loudly and spoke French fluently, but with such an accent that Nivelle did not always understand her, and she used very coarse expressions without knowing their meaning.

Nivelle felt so lonely that he was glad of this acquaintance; moreover, at the very outset Mary told him that she adored French poetry.

True, he discovered that she had bad taste, but how good it was to be able to talk about poetry and not about those damned politics! . . .

He read to her some of the poems from his new book; he had departed from the classics, had sought "rhythm and air" in poetry. She exclaimed rapturously: "Oh, how wonderful!"

He dedicated to her a poem which commenced with the lines:

*Yellow delta, cotton white,
Black sky with starry rash.
Hearest thou, Red Rose of Mississippi,
The heart's portent of the coming crash? . . .*

When he pronounced the words "Red Rose of Mississippi" she uttered a low cry, and placing his hands on her breast, she said:

"Can you feel it beat? . . ."

A week later he moved into a magnificent hotel room with a bathroom that looked like a dancing hall.

He made the following entry in his diary: "The second ordeal is about to commence. There will not be a third. May my beloved Proserpine, who knew the horrors of the nether world, give me strength." He tried to comfort himself with the thought: I'll get used to her, she is not so very ugly, only I must teach her to dress more quietly. Besides, she is very kindhearted. . . .

Mary turned out to be hard to get on with; her father could have told him that. She wanted love, and at thirty-nine, she wanted to make up for lost time. Nivelles would say: "Good night, dear," but she would answer: "I am not a bit sleepy. Read me some poetry. Start with the one you dedicated to me." . . . He would glance at her coarse, fiery hair and obediently begin to recite: "Red Rose of Mississippi." . . . He was aware that the situation in France would not clear up before two or three years, and Mary said: "As soon as the war's over we'll go to America. We will visit Dad for courtesy's sake, and then go and live in New York—there's a real artistic atmosphere there." . . .

Of the events in Paris Nivelles learned when he unfolded the *Journal de Genève*. He could not conceal his joy. I was lucky. It all started at the Prefecture. . . . Had I been there, I would have been torn from limb to limb. . . .

Mary put her own interpretation on the joy he expressed. She whispered:

"I congratulate you, darling. Kiss me . . . harder. . . ."

She ordered a sumptuous champagne supper. The wine brought out red patches on her face, her eyes became glassy. Suddenly she began to hurry Nivelles:

"Let's go to our room, dear, I am so tired. . . ."

When they got to their room she began to kiss him feverishly and said:

"You must write a poem about the liberation of Paris, about everything—the partisans, the Americans, Montparnass, and about our love..."

He was tipsy too, he was not listening to her chatter, his mind was filled with but a single thought: What a good thing I am not in Paris now...

She shook him impatiently:

"Tell me quick, who am I?"

He knew that the answer was: "Red Rose of Mississippi," but suddenly a feeling of revulsion overcame him—how long can one bear humiliation like this? ... He jumped up, pulled on his trousers, switched on the light and poked his tongue out at her. He expected her to strike him, or burst into tears—something is going to happen... But she smiled and said:

"Oh, that's wonderful! Only Frenchmen can love like that..."

* 17 *

Nina Georgiyevna decided to celebrate two events: Seryozha's arrival and Vasya's birthday. True, Vasya was absent, but Nina Georgiyevna said to Natasha and Olga: "We'll celebrate his birthday and spend the evening with Seryozha—he is leaving tomorrow." On the table there was a portrait of Vasya (he had it taken in Vilnius and had sent it recently), and next to it there was a bunch of asters. It seemed to Natasha that Vasya was at her side and several times she mentally clinked glasses with him. A month had already passed since she had received his first letter, but still she had not grown accustomed to her happiness, and every time she heard the name "Vasya" she smiled. He has turned up, writes nearly every day! ... She had received another long letter the day before—he is going to their "lair," he is dreaming of the day when he will see her and their son, and there were so many words of love in the letter that Natasha blushed when she thought of them. She was even shocked at the thought that the military censor had read that letter; she could barely comfort herself with the reflection: I don't know him, I shall never see him, and besides, they probably don't pay much attention to things like that, thousands of letters like that must pass through their hands. To Natasha's confusion and Sergei's amusement, little Vaska broke a wine glass and worthily representing his father, the artillery officer, cried out "boom! boom!"—there was to be a salute that evening, a "big one," as Olga said—in honour of the capture of Bucharest. Nina Georgiyevna gazed at her grandson with loving eyes.

It was an unusual evening; Olga thought to herself—a rehearsal of the victory celebration, although there was nothing exceptional about it—the family were gathered round the table, they had supper, ate the ex-

cellent pie that Nina Georgiyevna had baked, related, if rather disjointedly, what they had gone through, interrupted each other and suddenly fell silent—their hearts simply overflowed with happiness.

Just that morning Olga had received a letter from Lieutenant Sinyakov. He was somewhere in Rumania, he wrote that everything was going fine and that they would soon see each other. Olga had made his acquaintance in Kuibyshev, in the winter when he came home on leave to his mother after he was wounded. He was tall, and shy; he was an agronomist before the war. He was nearly thirty, but Olga had tended him as if he were a child. It was then that they married. Nina Georgiyevna's face beamed when she saw her daughter blush when she spoke of her husband; she had never been like that with Labazov. . . . She said to Seryozha: "I think Olga is really in love this time, don't you? . . ." He smiled absent-mindedly: "You say he is an agronomist and a lieutenant. Of course it's real. . . ."

Nina Georgiyevna and Seryozha had spent the whole day together. She had been waiting for him eagerly, as her only friend, with whom she could talk about everything that had been tormenting her for three years. She had carried through the war the ardour of youth. Olga would say about her with a smile: "You are our Y.C.L. organizer." At first Nina Georgiyevna had thought that Seryozha had changed a great deal; she asked herself in fright—has he become distant from me now? What astonished her was her son's self-restraint, but when she heard him make some bitter comment she shrivelled—perhaps he has become hard-hearted? Later she saw that he was still the Seryozha she had always known—impulsive, ardent, "inspired" as she said to herself, only outwardly he was calmer—it was evident that he had gone through a great deal. . . . In conversation they wandered from one subject to another. Nina Georgiyevna enquired about the Germans: "Did they talk frankly with you?" Then she meditated about death, and after that she roamed with Seryozha through the streets of insurgent Paris, dreamed of what it would be like after the war, told Sergei about her work, complained about the stupidity of a certain Miglyakov and admired the energy displayed by Shchegoleva, and wondered what books would be written about the autumn nights of nineteen forty-one. Sergei thought to himself: Why, she is nearer to me than many people of my own age, I don't feel that she belongs to another generation. . . .

"Do you know where you are going to be sent, Seryozha?" Olga asked him.

"To the South. I am lucky—perhaps I will get to the Balkans. . . . A German war prisoner told me that when they were capturing country after country, there was one thing that marred their pleasure—when they entered a town they found the windows shuttered, blinds drawn, people scuttling away from them. . . . But how they welcome us! Do you know, Mama, I always thought that tears of joy existed only in books.

But I don't think so now. I have seen them. In every liberated town. . . . I think that is our greatest reward."

"I can imagine, Seryozha, what it was like in Paris when the Germans surrendered. I know those people. When I read in the newspaper about the barricades. . . ."

Olga smiled:

"Barricades are in Hugo's book, Mama. Tanks decide everything today. Now when the American forces entered. . . ."

"They were French forces, by the way," said Sergei. "But that's not the point. . . . The partisans did play an important role, particularly a psychological role. . . . The chief point is that it was not in Paris that everything was decided. . . ."

"Where then, in Normandy?" enquired Olga.

"On the Volga. There was a signalsman there, he came up against some Germans, killed three of them; when he got back he grieved over having lost his pincers. I can't tell you the story—I am not a writer. . . . But it was fellows like that who liberated Paris."

Natasha said:

"I read about a girl in Paris who blew up a tank. I think it was in the *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. . . ."

Sergei threw his head back and became lost in thought. He was brought back to earth by little Vaska, who climbed on to the writing desk and upset the ink. Sergei burst out laughing.

"He's the spit of Vasya! I remember when Vasya was little. . . . When I read about his partisan unit I could not for the life of me picture it. . . . It was easier for us—we had an army commander, a plan of operations and rear services. But to fight as he did—three years in the forest. . . . Let's drink to Vasya!"

When Natasha, clinking glasses, looked at him, he screwed up his eyes—so bright was the light that shone in her deep blue eyes.

Natasha was pleased that Vaska resembled his father; it seemed to her that this sealed her union with her husband. Only their temperaments were different. . . . Vasya was calm, but this one. . . . There now! He's on the table again! You can't turn away from him for a minute! . . . He has his grandfather's temperament, just as irrepressible. . . . Natasha remembered how Dmitri Alexeyevich set to work one day to mend the clock. He took it all to pieces and said: "In a quarter of an hour it will go as regular as an observatory clock." But a little later he roared so loud that the neighbours came running in: "The fool I am. I've forgotten where this pin goes, and damn it, it's the most important part, all my work is wasted." . . . Natasha smiled to herself.

"I drink to the health of Valya," said Nina Georgiyevna.

As soon as he arrived Sergei said to his mother: "I have persuaded Valya to enter a theatrical studio. They have promised to release her from the factory. Send her a word of encouragement, Mama." . . . Nina

Georgiyevna was pleased. She was still absorbed in her work, but there were moments when she was oppressed by loneliness. Her relations with her daughter were as complicated as they had been before—affectionate and yet wary. As regards Natasha, she loved and was proud of her (you see the girl Vasya found!), but there was no real intimacy between them. At the beginning of the war Natasha had seemed a chit of a girl to Nina Georgiyevna and she had talked to her as to a child. When they met again she was amazed: Natasha had not only changed outwardly—the child had grown into a beautiful woman, she had also become mentally mature. Why is it difficult for me to talk to her?—Nina Georgiyevna would ask herself. She knew what separated her from Olga: her daughter's practicalness, common sense and sobriety of heart. But Natasha was not like that. . . . She could not understand why she felt embarrassed when she talked to Natasha. Perhaps she was overawed by the integrity of her nature, her strong character—the product of the times. She felt that Natasha stood firmly on her ground, and the ground under her feet was not imitation, but solid and real. . . . Natasha had learned to hold her tongue, to conceal her feelings, and sometimes Nina Georgiyevna thought that there was censure in that reserve: I seem such a softy beside her that it makes me feel ashamed. . . . If Natasha were at least once to reveal herself, display that childish affection that existed parallel with her pensive gravity, even severity, if Nina Georgiyevna could have read at least one of Natasha's letters to Vasya, or had known about the childish embarrassment she had felt when thinking about the censor, she would have felt a kindred spirit. As it was, she admired Natasha as an onlooker and longed for Valya's arrival. Valya wrote to her, sometimes impulsive letters, and sometimes letters of heartrending sadness. The world of art in which Valya lived was Nina Georgiyevna's world, although she had never written poems, had never played the piano and had never dreamed of going on the stage. Valya's letters seemed to her to be full of profound meaning that found no expression in words: it was the enchantment of a voice, the magic of metaphors. She saw in Valya the incarnation of her dreams, and more than once she asked herself in surprise: how was it that Seryozha found the woman that responded to his heart in that little, inconspicuous woman who was beautified only by her smile, a student girl in whom the professors had discerned no talent? He is impatient, but when he saw, he understood. . . .

Nina Georgiyevna said:

"It is so noisy now—at the front because of the shooting, and here because of the rejoicing. . . . I often think: what will it be like when quiet returns to the world? I think there will be much concentration, there will be great art. Last Wednesday I took a class at school, it was the fifth grade, wonderful children, and suddenly the thought occurred to me—this is what Pushkin was like during the War of Eighteen Hundred and Twelve. . . ."

Natasha livened up:

"I shall go back to the Academy next term. Yesterday I met a professor from the Timiryazev Academy. He is studying the acclimatization of fruit trees in the North—orchards in the Arctic. One hybrid they've got is simply amazing..."

Nina Georgiyevna bent over her grandson who had fallen asleep in a deep armchair, and thought about children: we are rearing the most unusual plants—people, the people of tomorrow, who will know no fear either of fire, of falsehood, or of blind nature.

"Do you often peer into the future, Seryozhenka, or have you no time for that sort of thing?"

"I think there is no time for that. . . . I met some foreign journalists near Minsk. I don't know whether they were good journalists or not, but they left an awful impression upon me. One of them talked to me like a fascist, wanted to know what we intended to do with Germany—'Americans are alarmed,' he said." . . .

"I don't understand," said Olga. "They are our allies, aren't they? . . ."

"But I understood when I talked to them. In nineteen forty-two they thought we were on the brink of the abyss, that the Germans would push us over, but break their own necks in the effort. Then the master would come and settle everything. But it has turned out different. . . . Why do you expect Ford to love the workers of Gorky? That would be unnatural. Listen Olya, there are books as well as newspapers. . . . In nineteen forty the term 'fascist' was not used in our newspapers—that was out of courtesy. But the fascists were fascists all the same. Perhaps you think some French bourgeois now loves us because we have saved him from the Germans. He will not forgive us for having saved him. He will contribute a hundred francs for a monument to Stalingrad and a hundred thousand francs to combat Communism. . . . I realized that when I spoke to those Americans, I recalled Paris, the debates, the missions they sent here for camouflage. . . ."

"But Seryozha, this is horrible!" exclaimed Nina Georgiyevna. "Do you mean to say that people will have no peace? . . ."

She seemed to be shielding little Vaska from a distant storm cloud.

But Sergei smiled:

"After Stalingrad, there's nothing to be afraid of. . . . They may snarl, but I doubt whether they will bite. And they are snarling because they realize that we are strong. We have shown them: a strong state, a strong nation, a strong people. And we have also shown that—the best are on our side. . . . I don't know what happened in Paris—the newspapers wrote little about it. But I saw Communists when I was there. I remember an engineer, a young workingman, and others. I am convinced that it was they who came into the street, not those who are snarling at us. . . ."

When the party broke up Nina Georgiyevna suddenly looked little, like a girl; she hugged Sergei tightly and then quickly turned away so that he should not see her tears, lit a cigarette and had a fit of coughing. Olga decided to spend the night with her mother. Sergei saw Natasha home. On the way she said suddenly:

"That was right what you said about our not being alone. When I was in Atkarsk I read an article in an old magazine I happened to come across about changing the climate of Labrador. A scientist proposed that the course of the Gulf Stream be changed and then even citrus fruit could be grown there. It's probably a utopian dream. . . . But in three years we have changed the climate of the world. You will ask me how I know. Well, I don't know much, I read the TASS telegrams and that's all. But a wounded partisan girl from Yugoslavia was brought to our hospital. I had long talks with her, and that's when I thought of it. . . . There must be people like her in Paris too. That girl who set fire to the tank, for instance. . . ."

Later Sergei roamed alone through blacked-out Moscow. The night was warm, like a summer night, but already black, like autumn. He lost his way in the labyrinth of streets between Kropotkinskaya and the Arbat. He was happy because of Valya's love, because he had seen his mother again, because Vasya had been found, and because he had seen Moscow again, vast, ungainly, in the process of building, very 'old, and amazingly young. He also thought of the girl in Paris who had blown up a tank, and amidst a host of fond shadows, down an avenue carpeted with leaves, Mado came towards him.

* 18 *

The fighting front shifted far away from Paris, but Lancier was unable to enjoy the blessings of peace. He searched for Louis, but in vain. Nobody could tell him where he was, he was told to wait until the Ministries returned to Paris. Everything looked unstable. Armed detachments of the F.F.I. marched through the streets. The stern appeals of various committees were posted on the walls. The newspapers called for a purge. Prices rose, and in the queues people could be heard saying: "It's worse than when the Germans were here." . . . The Americans occupied all the best hotels; they indulged in drunken orgies and young women were afraid to go out at night. Lancier lived in a state of feverish excitement; even Marthe could not tell what roused his indignation and what made him glad. One day they were walking through a boulevard (this was shortly after the city was liberated) and they saw a half-naked woman surrounded by a crowd of children, on her chest she had a tablet on which was inscribed: "I slept with Boches." Marthe exclaimed:

"Disgusting! How can the authorities allow it? . . ."

She was sure her husband agreed with her, but Lancier said:

"I can't understand why you should be sorry for this slut. To think that there were women who gallivanted with Germans while their husbands or brothers were dying for France!"

Morillot told Lancier that the F.F.I. had arrested the industrialist Boissy.

"Boissy?" exclaimed Lancier. "But what for?"

"For collaborating with the Germans."

"What does 'collaborating' mean? He carried on his business under the Germans, as everybody else did. You did not ask your patients on which side they were—the German or on the English; you treated them and took your fees. Were there no Communists among Boissy's workers? They earned money under the Germans, and good money too. Why aren't they arrested? Do you know what this is called? Terrorism!"

Lancier eagerly listened to the sinister rumours that were afloat. It was said that there were no police in the South and that the Communists were trying respectable people for treason and shooting them. And it was not much better in Paris, although the government and the Americans were here. Thousands of innocent people like Boissy were languishing in Drancy. Why haven't the F.F.I. been disarmed yet? True, they are heroes, they liberated Paris, everybody knows that. But there are no Germans here now. . . . They want to establish another Commune, that's what it is! What is de Gaulle thinking about? The Americans are boozing and brawling; they would do better if they established order. . . ."

"Have you heard what is going on, cher ami?" Lancier asked Pinaud. "We are on the brink of disaster. . . ."

Pinaud blew his nose, as always, solemnly and mournfully.

"You must not exaggerate. The people are like children; you must allow them to enjoy the melodrama 'The Triumph of Justice.' Fortunately, there is more noise than damage. Within a month or two normalcy will be restored."

Marthe had often scolded her husband for his lack of restraint: "You make people feel awkward." He would answer: "What can I do, my dear, I am made that way." . . . This time too he distinguished himself. He asked Pinaud bluntly:

"But aren't you afraid they will seize you before normalcy is restored?"

"Seize me? . . . What for?"

"For 'collaborating.' That's their favourite expression. As if they need much for that. It will be enough if somebody informs them that you dined with Schirke, or with Hauser. They may bring up the story about Lévy's house. . . ."

Usually restrained and judicious, Pinaud lost his temper; it seemed to him that Lancier wanted to get him into trouble. He got up and said in a slow and dignified manner:

"The government knows that I supported the Resistance as far back as nineteen forty-two at the risk of my life. I did not write panegyrics to traitors...."

Later Pinaud smiled ironically: why did I take Lancier seriously?... He was only chattering. And Lancier said to Marthe:

"I shouldn't have offended Pinaud, I got a little heated. But I don't understand a thing now. It turns out that in nineteen forty-two he was connected with London. But I remember how he fawned upon Schirke.... He was making more in a week than I have made all my life. Do you think I am envious? No. I never envied wealth. Pinaud knows how to make money, but he does not know how to spend it, he is a businessman and nothing more. But I ask you, why did he bring up that obituary?..."

Marthe sighed:

"I told you not to send it to the press...."

"Women always talk like that." (Lancier squealed.) "If a man is dying, the woman will say that he should not have sat at an open window, or have taken a glass of something. At least you might be sorry for me. I am ruined...."

"Nobody is touching you, Maurice. They haven't even come here...."

"Do you want them to come? It will be too late to be sorry then. I am doomed.... The Americans don't care a hang about us; they dash about in their jeeps and run people over. And de Gaulle prides himself on being as tall as the Eiffel Tower, struts about and dreams of glory, and doesn't care that those monsters are killing innocent people. Perhaps I have only a few more days to live...."

Marthe wanted to call the doctor, but Lancier would not permit her:

"Let me die in peace! Morillot does not heal, he mocks at you...."

Pinaud had no intention of quarreling with his partner. He came again two days later and started the conversation with a proverb (he was fond of proverbs, he said they expressed "the common sense of the people"):

"Old friendship never grows rusty. You shouldn't pay attention to silly things. Everybody's nerves are on edge. It's the times we are living in...."

They discussed business affairs. Later Pinaud said:

"The Minister told me that he had met you before the war. He spoke about you in very cordial terms...."

This put Lancier in a splendid mood at once. I must take some bromide, Marthe is right—my nerves have all gone to pot. Why attach importance to trifles? The chief thing is that the Boches have been kicked out. France is France again. And Lancier said to all his acquaintances: "You can't imagine how happy I am! I don't wear my heart on my sleeve, but probably I have suffered more than anybody else during the past four years. No, no, we have all suffered, like fish out of water. What would you have? Frenchmen cannot live without liberty...."

It was a wonderful day, a real Indian summer. Lancier strolled through the streets, soothed by the limpid air and thoughts of liberty. He was going to see whether an answer had been received to his enquiry about Louis. He was led into a spacious office. Everything in it was reminiscent of recent events—the cracked windowpanes pasted over with paper, a dainty chair from a lady's boudoir next to a huge writing desk, and files next to tins of American canned food. Colonel Dejean was tall, grey haired, and looked so venerable that it seemed as though he had been created for the purpose of handing out decorations and of unveiling monuments. His voice too was low and had a noble ring.

"I have sad news for you, Monsieur Lancier," he said. "Your son, Lieutenant Louis Lancier, died like a hero for France. He has been made a member of the Legion of Honour, and has been awarded the Soviet Patriotic War Medal." . . .

Lancier tightly gripped the hat he was holding, and tears dripped from his eyes.

"You may be proud of a son like that, Monsieur Lancier. . . ."

Lancier did not remember how he had taken leave of the Colonel, or how he got home. He said to Marthe: "Louis." and she understood everything at once.

He sat in a semi-dark room and gazed at his son's photograph. Marthe, walking on tiptoe, brought her husband some medicine and stroked his head. During the two years they had lived together she had grown accustomed to Maurice dropping into despair for no reason at all, but now, for the first time, she appreciated his grief and felt more drawn to him because of it.

For a time Lancier could think of nothing but his son's childhood, his illnesses, Marceline's anxiety, the boy's pranks, his merry laughter, and their last meeting in Bordeaux. Later he began to reproach himself: I did not fully appreciate Louis, he was eclipsed in my eyes by Mado. I thought he was rough and boisterous, that he did not appreciate shades of feeling. But he understood everything. . . . He sincerely loved France. It is not enough to admire the elms at Gelinotte, one must be able to give one's life for them. How strange—Louis repeated somewhere in Russia the epic of every defender of Verdun. . . . Verily, he was my son. I can understand why he went there—he sought danger. He hated politics, as I do. . . . What difference does it make what sort of government they have in Russia? They have fought magnificently, even the Germans have admitted that. I prefer to have the Americans here, but this does not prevent me from admitting that were it not for Stalingrad the Germans would still be in Paris. . . . I think I have been mistaken about the Russians, the German newspapers misled us. Their war has been a patriotic one, even the name of this medal shows that. . . . I may censure our Communists, but I bow to the patriotism of the Russians. Louis understood that before I did. The Colonel was right—one can be proud of a son

like that. He was big-hearted, like Marceline. Perhaps I too gave him the best of what was in me—the memory of Verdun. . . . But how horrible that I should have lost him! . . .

When Morillot came Lancier said:

“Well, Louis is dead. . . . We can be proud of our sons. I have often asked myself: What will I leave when I am gone except my silly collections and Roche aîné? Now I know that somebody gratefully remembers Louis’ deed. That is a big thing. Why, the fires of Verdun light up France to this day. . . .”

Morillot said:

“You have Mado. . . .”

“I don’t know. Perhaps she too has been killed—in Russia, or in Africa. . . .”

This had been in the beginning of October. Shortly after that Mado walked into Lancier’s room.

She had been in Paris for several weeks, but could not bring herself to go and visit her father. When she was still in Limoges somebody in her presence said: “I worked at Roche aîné, Lancier walked on his hind legs like a pup in front of the Germans.” . . . Mado knew her father well and could easily picture his behaviour. But she longed to see the home in which she had spent her childhood, and she wanted to make sure that her father was not being neglected—Morillot had told her that Lancier had married, and had spoken in praise of Marthe. But her whole being revolted at the thought of meeting her father. She went to see him only after Morillot had told her that he was crushed by the news of Louis’ death.

Lancier uttered a cry of astonishment, but could not speak, his tears choked him. Mado tenderly embraced him; then she picked up Louis’ photograph from the table and gazed at it for a long time. Lancier said:

“Do you know where he was killed? In Russia. . . . He sought danger. . . . Politics aside, we must admit that the Russians have fought better than all the rest. I can understand why Louis chose Russia. Do you remember the engineer who visited us before the war? Already at that time he said that the Russians would fight magnificently. Nivelles wouldn’t believe him. . . . That Nivelles turned out to be an utter scoundrel; I have been told that he has scuttled off to Germany. Poor Léo, he was sent to some camp and nothing has been heard of him. . . . We wanted to save him, but the Germans were too strong for us. Dumas was arrested. . . . And Léontine died a real heroine, like Louis. . . . But why am I saying all this? I have aged very much, Mado, my thoughts get mixed up in my head. . . . The main thing is that I have found you. Where have you been all these years? . . .”

Instead of answering her father’s last question Mado began to question him about Louis; then they recalled the years long passed. Marceline, Gelinotte. Nevertheless, Lancier repeated his question:

"Where have you been, Mado?"

(He wanted to ask why she had left her husband, but he was afraid to utter the name Berty—suppose she knew about that obituary article? . . .)

"With the maquis. And before that, here, in the underground. . . ."

"Why did you not come to see me?"

"I could not. I was fighting. . . ."

Lancier smiled to himself: everybody says "I have been fighting" now. But what kind of soldier could Mado have been? . . . She must have fallen in love with some terrorist and painted his portrait. . . . He looked at her fondly. Suddenly he felt uneasy. This is not Mado! She's a changeling. . . . What stern eyes she has! Not only stern, but mad. She has Marceline's temperament. But Marceline gave herself to love, she left her father to come to me. But Mado left her husband to go to the maquis. . . .

"What do you mean by 'fighting,' Mado? You didn't shoot people, did you? . . ."

She smiled sadly:

"I did what they all did."

He realized that he would get nothing more out of her. He enquired timidly:

"You will stay here, won't you? We have prepared a room for you."

"No. And don't ask me to—it is impossible."

"But why?"

"I am living a different life now."

She said no more; she looked at her father kindly, but as though he were a stranger. He thought to himself in horror: perhaps she has become a Communist? . . . He was afraid to ask her—afraid that she would answer "yes." Suddenly he noticed a livid stripe on Mado's arm, above the elbow, and, forgetting everything, he enquired, as if she were still a little girl:

"Where did you get that bruise? . . ."

"Oh, it's nothing. In the Gestapo. . . ."

He was so bewildered that he could say no more. Mado spoke to Marthe and then got up to go. Lancier embraced her and begged her with a childlike smile:

"Come and see me, all right?"

She smiled too and answered: "All right." But he realized that she would not come. He wanted to see her out, but he felt weak and lay down on the couch. Marthe went into the garden with Mado. They had taken a liking to each other at once. Mado was glad that her father had this kindhearted woman at his side; and Marthe, who before Mado had come had feared that she would censure her father for having married again, now felt confidence in her.

"Maurice is a child," said Marthe.

Mado nodded.

"Have you been in a partisan unit?"

"Yes."

Marthe impulsively embraced her. Later she said to her husband:

"You have an extraordinary daughter..."

"Yes, and it's surprising, she is prettier than ever, although she doesn't look well..."

"I don't mean that. She amazed me. She has a big heart, you can see that..."

"She takes after Marceline," answered Lancier in a low voice. "Only, times are different now. In the past, people knew how to love. Now, everybody has gone mad, all they know is to fight..."

He sat in the dark for a long time meditating about old age, about his loneliness, and about Mado—it seemed to him that she had been fighting not against the Germans, but against him, and that was why she had been unwilling to tell him about it...

Several days later Lancier was having lunch with Pinaud and lawyer Garcy. They decided to celebrate the liberation of Paris. Lancier studied the menu and closely questioned the restaurant keeper whether the *ragoût* was really of hare and not of some tainted rabbit—after all, this was the close season for hare...

Lawyer Garcy, who was about to be appointed Pinaud's attorney, recalled the period of occupation. On several occasions he had placed his apartment at the disposal of the A.S. and on one occasion Châtelet and Lejean had met there. Everything sounded romantic in the way Garcy related it:

"Meetings of the organization used to be held at my place. I sat with a revolver in my hand ready to shoot myself if the Boches turned up so as not to fall into the hands of the Gestapo alive..."

Pinaud thought to himself: He's worth the money he gets. He can talk round any tribunal. Aloud he said:

"We have shown the world that there are heroes in France. I myself am too old for that sort of thing, but I too helped the best way I could. And my son-in-law Pinson, in Switzerland, helped to get maquisards across the frontier... It is a real epic..."

He stopped talking and attacked the hare.

Lancier only smiled. He spoke only when the pears and nuts were served.

"I underrated the present age. The young people have proved that they are heroes. I am not afraid of extremes—youth refuses to recognize a moderate climate. Louis did not hang around in London clubs as some others did, he rushed into the thick of it—in Russia. I am far from being a Communist, but I can't help admiring that gesture. And Mado went to the maquis, she saw real fighting... She was not even afraid of the Gestapo. When you look at that frail woman you wonder where she got the strength from. Perhaps I contributed something towards it,

it was always my wish to imbue my children with the spirit of Verdun. Since June nineteen forty I have lived for but one thing—the storm. I will not tell you what I have done—it is better to be modest nowadays: there are too many pseudo-heroes and braggarts about. In all probability, those who did least, did most. . . . Old Villon has some wonderful lines:

*Only the liar brings us truth,
Only the saint looks sly, forsooth.
Of all singers the ass most earns his pence,
And only lovers talk sound sense. . . .”*

“You have an amazing memory,” said Garcy.

Pinaud thought to himself: how can a serious-minded man find pleasure in frivolous stuff like that? If he were a lawyer, it would be different. . . . But the meal was nice and the future rosy—that morning Pinson had told his father-in-law that a start had been made in disarming the F.F.I.—and Pinaud readily raised his glass when Garcy proposed a toast “to the heroes and heroines of the Resistance.”

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When Mado went to Corbeille, she stood at the very window at which she had first spoken to Sergei. At that time Sergei said: “I have fallen in love with Paris”; those words now sounded like a confession to Mado. She had been thinking of Sergei very often lately; perhaps this was because a sharp change had taken place in her life, France had become Mado again, and in the new, mundane existence she had to find a continuation of that impulse that had sustained her during the past few years. She went to visit Sembat, and her longing for art, which only recently had seemed to belong to the vague and distant past, suddenly revived. Sembat insisted that she should tell him about her life among the maquis, but she gazed at his canvases and thought with emotion: what simplicity, frugality of colour and severity! A river and trees, trees and a river, nothing extraordinary, one would think—greys, pale greens, and sometimes a tint of blue. . . . Why does a tree in a picture move me so? Why, I have lived among trees! . . . She did not know whether she would return to the art she had loved, she did not know how she would combine that art with life, with the struggle, with the thought she had expressed to Lejean: “They must not be allowed to patch up the ruins and call them palaces.” . . . She did not yet know anything about what her future would be. In Sembat’s studio she recalled her meeting with Sergei, the daisies, the coffee-pot in the kitchen, and his astonished eyes. No, she could never get away from that!

Bear told Mado that he was to be sent to Marseilles and from there he was going to Odessa by boat. She decided to write to Sergei; she

decided to do that on the impulse of the moment; she was sitting in her room late in the afternoon and suddenly she began to write, in feverish haste, as if afraid that she would be unable to finish the letter before dark (there was no electric light, and she had no candles) and then she would be unable to write. . . . She wrote at the open window—there was more light there. Cold, autumn rain was falling. Several drops splashed on the writing paper; Mado started in fright—has it blurred the ink? No. What a relief. He might have thought I was crying. . . .

“SERGEI, I want to tell you how I heard about you. It was in a forest, on the fifth of June, I shall never forget that night, we had been informed about the landing. Bear told me about you—quite by accident. I was roaming in the forest and you were at my side. Later, our men went out to blow up bridges. That night Miki was killed. He went out singing his favourite song, it is ringing in my ears now: ‘Others will greet the sun, and laugh and drink and sing, and perhaps forget the thing, that we too loved life and fun.’ Bear will tell you how we fought. I am unable to tell a connected story, you probably remember, I always muddle things. During these past years I often thought of you, I learned the meaning of all you told me in Paris, and of what you did not tell me, because you would not, or could not. For some reason I thought you were in Stalingrad, I realize that it was foolish, the front ‘was long, and it did not matter what sector you were in, to us ‘Stalingrad’ means Russia. We were with you all the time, this is true, I would not dare say this to you if I did not remember the comrades who have perished—in battle, or in the Gestapo. You remember my saying, Sergei, that we would each live our own life. That is how it turned out. I know you are married, I am glad, I too have a family, I am happy. As for the other thing, I have not forgotten, nor can I forget it, and although I am not certain, I think that you too have not forgotten. We were probably very foolish then, we quarrelled for some reason and made it up, but after all is said and done, we discovered a big thing that summer, and that big thing helped me to live, to rise to the surface when I was right down in the depths. Perhaps we will meet one day, not soon, I hope it will not be soon, when we are both old. I know that even when I am old I will look at you with my former eyes, you used to say that they ‘lived separately.’ You were the only one I looked at that way. Formerly, I used to think that you gave me a dream, but when life collapsed, what had seemed a dream became real life. This letter is a complete muddle, but I want you to believe that my life is more intelligible and simpler. Bear will tell you if you ask him that I behaved with coolness, there was no madcap in the unit. The madcap was left on that bench under the chestnut tree. I went there to see—the bench is still there, and the avenue is the same, and the city. Of course, everything is different—it is very sad here now—different and yet the same. Be happy,

Sergei, Mado wishes it. I have learnt to speak a little Russian, Bear taught me, he is kind and patient, I wanted to write in your language, but I was afraid I would not be able to. I will only write this. . . .”

In accurate, printed letters, she wrote in Russian:

“Proshchai, moiya lyubov.*

Yours,

Mado.”

She laid down her pen and wept. She took up the letter and wanted to read it, but then decided: no, if I read it I will not send it off.

Without reading the letter, she gave it to Bear when he came to say good-bye.

Voronov smiled in embarrassment: he had known the partisan France, but here Mado, wearing city clothes, was sitting in front of him. But his embarrassment quickly vanished—Mado spoke to him about the partisan unit, about their comrades, Miki’s jokes and Jose’s dreaming.

“When will you get home, soon?”

“I don’t know. They say I’ll have to wait in Marseilles a long time for a boat.”

“Marseilles is a gay city, but remember, they exaggerate everything a hundredfold there.”

Voronov laughed:

“We have a city like that too. . . . Odessa.”

“Are you glad you are going home?”

Voronov did not have to answer that question, his broad, kindly smile answered for him.

“Remember our unit when you get home, Bear. You know how much we love you, tell your people about it. . . . And don’t forget to convey old Désiré’s greetings. You remember, he asked you to do so before he died. . . . He dreamed of vineyards outside of Moscow. Probably, there will be some day. . . . When there are, drink a sip of that wine to the forest in Limousin. You have seen much that is bad in this country, and things are not bright now. Luc told me yesterday that our people have been disarmed. And cowards are going about shouting that they are heroes. . . . But let the Russians know that there is Luc, and Dédé; such men cannot be vanquished, and we have lots of men like that. You may believe me, Bear, I have travelled from town to town, wandered from village to village, and I have seen our people. . . . It is the custom to give flowers when saying good-bye, but flowers soon fade; if I could, I would give the love of France to take with you. . . .”

When Voronov was already on the stairs Mado ran after him and said in a rapid whisper:

* Farewell, my love.—Tr.

"If you find Vlahov, tell him. . . . I forgot to write it in my letter. . . . Tell him that Russians saved me from death on two occasions. The first he knows about, the second was when you came to the prison. Good-bye, Bear! . . ."

Voronov could not restrain himself, clumsily, like a real bear, on the dark, winding staircase, he embraced Mado.

She stood at the window and watched him walk down the street and vanish in the grey distance, and as she watched she repeated: "Good-bye, Sergei! Good-bye love! . . ." It seemed to her that she had met Sergei and had parted from him again, this time forever. She had learned to master her feelings, she no longer dreamed of happiness; she was ready for new battles, for a stern and hard life. Lejean, who had seen her the day before, had been amazed by her coolness, fortitude and faith. But for all that, madcap Mado had not remained on the prewar bench under the chestnut tree; she was now standing at the window gazing with her large, bright eyes across the distance, across the years—at the one she loved more than ever before.

* 20 *

"What a picture this would make for *Ogonyok*, Comrade Major!" said Lieutenant Babushkin.

Sergei laughed—it no doubt was a wild scene: a jeep so piled up with roses, asters and peonies that the car was hardly visible, and amidst the flowers a Major of the Engineers, thickly coated with road dust.

They were approaching the first Bulgarian town. The highroad was lined with people: black-eyed girls, with high, protruding foreheads, tender but stern-looking, high-school boys in their uniforms, old, grey-whiskered peasants (looking like portraits of Zaporozhye Cossacks), young, olive-skinned priests who looked as if they had walked out of ancient frescoes, partisan girls armed with German tommy guns, school-teachers and assistant doctors in tussore jackets, barefooted but festively dressed peasant women and vociferous children. All threw flowers into the cars and in front of them and kept on repeating: "Na dobr chass! . . ."* And a wooden arch, built overnight, bore the inscription: "Dobre doshli!"** Later, Sergei was carried shoulder high, his face wearing an embarrassed smile. An old man who said he had been in the militia and had fought on Shipka Hill, embraced him. A woman in a black kerchief showed him a photograph of a handsome girl, her daughter Lelyana, who had been shot by the Germans; the woman said:

* Welcome.—Tr.

** Welcome.—Tr.

"Mnogo mi yeh tezhko. . . Drugar! . . . Russiya. . . Pobedata. . ."* And again there were flowers, violet and white iris, blue grapes with the bloom on them, enormous waxen apples and fragrant quinces.

White cottages with verandahs; red peppers drying. Winding roads. Tall oaks, plane trees, fig trees and cedars. Valleys with vineyards. On the mountain sides flocks of sheep, like clouds.

The popular rejoicing was like a river which had overflowed its banks and had flooded the world. And along the roads marched a vast, powerful army; it was now aware that nothing could stand up against it. Hundreds of tanks clattered. The long necks of guns were turned westward. Guards Divisions marched over sticky clay, hot dust and stones. And the men who marched were rejoicing as much as the people who lined the roads: for a few days the war was concealed by this hedge of roses and girls (they called them "momicheta" here). And the fact that the signboards were painted in Russian letters, and that the foreign, unintelligible language suddenly became intelligible, sounded like their own, elated the men who had come across rivers, through battles, through a great misfortune. "I was at Stalingrad, and look where I've got to," a Red Army man, no longer young, told the Bulgarians, and they sat him in the place of honour and treated him to wine, cool and fragrant, like early autumn.

"Well, here we are, in Yugoslavia," said Babushkin.

Sergei smiled. How many times, on reading about the Yugoslav partisans in the newspaper, had he tried to picture this enigmatic country; it seemed to him that in the mountains of Bosnia or Montenegro, the war had not yet donned the camouflage overall, had not yet learned the dry language of iron. . . .

Men clambered over cliffs. Tanks crept up steep, narrow roads. Rapid, yellow rivers surged. Dark gorges suddenly loomed in front of them.

The Germans were now trying to check the advance. Battles were in progress.

General Belsky said to Sergei:

"We must get some tanks across tonight. Narovchatov is in a ridiculous plight—the Germans over there have about thirty self-propelled guns, and he hasn't a blasted thing. . . ."

While Sergei's men were putting up a splendid sixty-ton bridge the Germans blew up the locks; the water rose rapidly and swept the landing stage away. The sappers worked like mad—the tanks had to get across before morning. . . .

"Make fast to the tree!" shouted Sergei.

He himself hauled the rope. The night was cold, but every now and again he wiped his brow.

* She suffered much. . . . Friend! . . . Russia. . . . Victory. . . .—*Tr.*

He had long ago given up regarding the moon as something abstract, pleasant, if anything: the moon was an enemy. Dark nights he affectionately called "sappers' nights." But that night was bright, hostile. The Germans were bombarding the crossing. The moon set at two a.m., the bridge was already finished. Sergei slept until daybreak. In the morning he gazed enraptured at the bridge. At that moment he even forgot about the surrounding mountains, about the golden, spreading trees, about the fact that he was in Yugoslavia. To him, a bridge was first of all a bridge, as colours are to a painter and tulips to a gardener.

And then the saucy, indefatigable jeep dashed on further.

Sergei met the Yugoslav partisans on a cold, rainy, autumn night. He was with General Belsky, when an adjutant announced the arrival of representatives of the Yugoslav army.

Three men entered: Captain Lukovic, formerly a first term student at the Belgrade University, Mirko, a tall and very lean peasant, and a dark, good-looking girl named Vida. Lukovic stepped up to the General and said with emotion:

"Druzhe..."*

Colonel Yovanovic had sent them. The Captain reported. Now and again the General interrupted the interpreter: "I understand..." A small Serbian town forty kilometres to the south. There was no road to the place—the bridge was blown up.... The partisans had liberated the town in September but that day Germans had arrived with tanks.... Colonel Yovanovic had only four guns at his command....

"How many tanks have the Germans?" enquired Belsky.

"Eight or nine, two of them big ones..."

"I am sorry for the inhabitants," said Mirko. "The Germans will torture even the children to death. Colonel Yovanovic said: 'If only the Red Army were near.'..."

(Mirko pronounced the words "Tsrвна Armija" in a whisper.)

Belsky said:

"I don't see what I can do.... Our route lies in the opposite direction—northwest. And we must not delay. Still, in a case like this.... I think I can spare about a dozen tanks. As for getting them across, let the Major, here, think it out...."

The General invited the Yugoslavs to table:

"I have two hours to spare. Let's have supper.... You are the first to come and see us, so it's a holiday in a way...."

Sergei divided his attention between the new bridge that had to be built and what the partisans were saying. All three had been fighting since the spring of nineteen forty-two. They spoke about the Germans' fourth and fifth offensives; mountain passes, snow knee deep, no boots.... "Danko had one of his feet frozen, gangrene set in, we had

* Friend.—*Tr.*

no surgical instruments, so he begged us to chop it off with an axe. . . .” They said they had fought Germans, Italians, Hungarians and Ustachis; during that difficult autumn they listened to the radio: “Stalingrad se yosh drji.” . . . * “Don’t translate,” the General shouted to the interpreter. “I understand!” . . . (the General was moved—he had fought in Stalingrad). The partisans had never doubted that the Russians would achieve victory. Mirko drank a glass of vodka and told the story about himself: he kissed the doorpost of his house, took his wife and son and went off to the partisans. His son was killed, but his wife was still over there—fighting. . . . Captain Lukovic said: “Twice we beat off tanks. . . . Vida blew up one of them. . . .” Sergei threw his head back and stared at the girl so intently that the latter blushed. “I would never think it! . . . It’s terrible to picture her next to a tank. . . .” He recalled that Natasha had spoken about a girl in Paris who had blown up a tank. . . . He could only vaguely picture it then, but now he saw that it was true. “These, then, are our friends! While I was at the crossing and the Volga seethed at night, they were fighting in these mountains and were saying to each other: ‘Stalingrad is holding on.’ . . .”

Unable to control himself, Sergei got up and paced up and down the room. He thought he could see Liberty flying over Europe, she had swept over Bulgaria and was now hastening to the green Adriatic, she will fly over the whole world. . . .

“We must give them a hand, Comrade Major,” said Belsky. “I cannot stay, we start out at eleven hours, nought, nought. What can I leave here? Ten tanks, say, under Major Prikhodko, you, and a company of sappers. . . . And you think out how it’s to be done. . . .”

Captain Lukovic and Sergei were studying the map. Mirko whispered to Vida: “A Russian. . . . Understand?” Vida answered angrily: “Be quiet, you are interfering with their work!” She gazed admiringly at Sergei, he was the first Russian officer she had seen. To her he seemed wonderfully attractive: one could see at once that he was strong, but he had a mild face, and a smile wandered over it like a sunbeam on the wall. . . .

The bridge was built in two hours; it was a strong bridge on trestle supports. Mirko went into raptures over it. Sergei said: “This is not the Danube.” . . . He hurried the sappers: the Germans had been lording it in the town for twenty-four hours already, and Lukovic said they were S.S. men from Greece. . . .

Elation reigned at Colonel Yovanovic’s Headquarters. Everybody looked at Sergei with such love in his eyes that it made Sergei feel awkward. He said: “The bridge was only a small matter. . . . The tankists are going to have a tough job here.” . . .

There were many girls among the partisans. Sergei reflected: Per-

* Stalingrad is holding on.—*Tr.*

haps Mado is fighting like this—with a rifle among rugged mountains? . . . How everything has changed! It is hard to believe that this may end. Mado will go back to her painting, Lukovic will go in for his examinations, and I will begin to argue with Belchev about standardized bridges again. . . . When we had peace we could not picture war, but now, I cannot picture peace, I want to, but I can't. It seems to me that at first there will be a profound silence, as it was in Stalingrad after the Germans surrendered, it will be a mild, windless day, maybe a grey, Moscow day, with a slight drizzle. And everybody will be smiling. . . . Perhaps when the war ends I shall learn what has happened to Mado, whether she is alive. . . .

Elagin with a squad of sappers cleared the highroad of mines. Here a tank battle took place. We lost three T-34's and Major Prikhodko was wounded. Two "Tigers" and two small German tanks were put out of action. The rest of the German tanks turned and made off to the west. Then an attack on the town was launched. On its outskirts there was an old fort that had been built by the Turks. Sergei decided to blow the fort up. Just before midday, Major Lessing, who was hiding in the underground vaults of the fort, ordered the white flag to be hoisted. The order to cease fire was given. Everybody thought this was the end; parlementaires were sent into the town to inform the Germans that Major Lessing had ordered resistance to cease. But the Germans in the town were S. SO men from another unit, and they refused to surrender. The fight lasted all day, all night and half the next day; it was led by Colonel Yovanovic and Sergei. At four o'clock some Yugoslav artillerymen arrived and reported that the last of the Germans were crawling out of their holes with their hands up.

Until that moment the town had seemed deserted. Now the streets were crowded. A festival of rejoicing commenced. The people hugged the Russians, danced the kolo and formed a vast choir lined up round the town square among the maple and the lime trees, wound like a serpent through the streets and lined up again on the green near the fort. The sun still cast a rosy light up the jagged pinnacles of the mountains that towered over the town, but in the narrow streets grey twilight already reigned.

Sergei strolled down one of these streets accompanied by Mirko. They were followed by an enthusiastic crowd of girls and children shouting: "Moscow! Bel-grad!" Suddenly, a burst of firing was heard. Sergei guessed at once that it came from one of the basements nearby. . . . Mirko stood as if petrified. Sergei snatched the hand grenade that was stuck in Mirko's belt, pulled the safety catch with his teeth and hurled the grenade into the basement. In the same instant he fell prone to the ground.

He was carried to the town hospital. Deathly silence reigned in the town, as in a house where a patient is lying gravely ill; all singing and

cheering ceased. Girls crowded round the hospital and enquired how the Russian was, and did he need a blood transfusion.

Sergei's delirium was as turbulent, vivid and hurried as his life had been. At one moment he was flying from Moscow to Paris, and beneath him everything was burning; at another moment he was climbing up a cliff on which Valya was standing with a chaplet on her head like Ophelia; she said "dobre doshol"* and fell into the gorge. Voronov was building a very long bridge, and when Sergei asked him what river it was, Voronov laughed and answered that it was not a river. . . . But what is this? He was riding in a jeep over an endless bridge and he could not tell who was sitting beside him, Vida or Mado? It must be Mado, she was singing: "A soldier was at the wars ten years." . . . How long have I been in the war? Now another battle is being fought. . . . Then everything calmed down, like the sea when the wind drops. Nina Georgiyevna was bending over him, saying: "There is nothing to be afraid of, Seryozhenka," and he answered: "I am not afraid, Mama. I am feeling quite well. There. I am home now. I am in Russia, am I not? . . ." And the rain-washed fields and simple flowers outside of Moscow were the last things that passed through his mind. Dead, he looked as though he were alive—his face showed neither the impress of suffering nor the coldness of death; it seemed as though he were still walking across the grassy and daisy-bedecked field.

Later, Lieutenant-Colonel Vershinin said to Belsky:

"He was the best sapper in the Corps, and he died for nothing. . . ."

Belsky retorted angrily:

"What do you mean for nothing? Have you been told what his funeral was like. Not only was the whole town there, but people came from the villages. A Yugoslav colonel delivered a speech and said: 'This Soviet officer died in saving our wives and children.' . . . We are greatly indebted to them. I don't mean for military aid. How could they help us when the entire German army, with all its supplements, hurled itself against us, and they three thousand versts away, without even having arms? . . . What I mean is: who fought honestly in nineteen forty-one? Only we and they. The fact that their numbers were few is not important; what is important is: they did not spare themselves. . . . I had a very high opinion of Major Vlahov and his death is a great loss to the Corps. but the way he died can evoke only our profoundest admiration. . . ."

Sergei was buried under an old maple tree in the town square. His grave was covered with the last flowers of the autumn—bright dahlias and nasturtiums. In the evening women lit tapers, and the tiny lights kept flickering as if expressing the ardour of the heart that had ceased to beat.

Although the tankists and Colonel Yovanovic's men had also fought here, the people said concerning the Major of the Engineers: "He saved

* Welcome.—Tr.

our town." Girls meeting their sweethearts under the maple and chestnut trees spoke about him, as did the old men sitting in dim, smoke-laden taverns; schoolteachers spoke about him to their pupils, and the mothers of partisans who had perished in battle never forgot to light the slender tapers over his grave as soon as dusk set in. Everybody had the feeling that he was walking through the streets in his long, quick strides, his head thrown back, lost in thought. When Vida's comrades asked her what the Russian Major had talked to her about, she did not answer; Sergei had spoken to her only about the road and the plan of the town, but it seemed to her that he had told her something very important, and on dozing off she saw his shadow on the tall cliffs that intersected the road from the river to the town. And the old nurse, recalling how the Russian had died, said: "He called somebody, but I could not make out who it was."...

* 21 *

Krylov celebrated New Year's Eve as the guest of the Divisional Commander. They drank champagne. Colonel Elizarov played old waltzes on an out-of-tune piano. A young Polish woman brought in a steaming dish and said something rapidly—it sounded very polite, but not quite intelligible—like a repetition of "psh-psh." "Let's hope it's going to be a good year," said the General. Krylov clinked glasses with him and said: "You can have too much of a good thing. To put it short: my wish is that you and I will not celebrate the next new year together." The General laughed: "I am certain we won't," he said. "It's going to start soon..."

And it did start soon. Dmitri Alexeyevich had been at the front from the very beginning of the war, but he had never seen anything like this. The war, which three years ago had seemed to him to consist of thousands of separate major and minor episodes precariously connected by frail wires, now reminded him of a huge industrial plant. Krylov laughed to himself: formerly, the common expression had been "exactly," "exactly," but nothing was exact; now this catchword is going out of fashion, but everything is so exact that even those colts are green with envy. The day before an Oberleutnant had sighed: "Before the war we used to be proud of the fact that our trains ran punctual to the minute, but look at the way your tanks are running now."... There was so much artillery that Krylov growled—it's amazing your ear drums don't burst. And the artillerymen fired not at random, but with such precision that it seemed as though they had been studying the enemy's gun emplacements all their lives. They got the range even before they started firing, said Krylov to himself. Then the tanks raced into the night with dazzling headlights, got deep into the enemy's rear and

bombarded his Staff Headquarters, stores, trains, and an officers' club where the veterans of Narvik were playing cards and the youngsters were dancing with amorous young wives and widows; they bombarded editorial offices where only an hour before an editor had written a leading article about the destruction of London, which had been wiped off the face of the earth by the "weapon of retribution," and about the greatness of the Führer; they bombarded houses from which Lieutenant-Colonels and Oberscharführers in striped pyjamas came flying in panic, unable to understand who could be shooting a hundred kilometres from the front line.

Indescribable were the roads, with carts crushed by tanks, chests of drawers, armchairs, ball dresses, bird cages, crowds of frantic German women in trousers, cows wildly bellowing to be milked, abandoned lap dogs, trying on their short legs to escape from human madness, and a veritable snowstorm of feathers from torn quilts; and this snowstorm continued to rage on that pale, sunny, winter's day, which was like a belated autumn, or a bad rough sketch of spring.

At first Krylov saw wrecked, deserted towns: the entire population had fled to the west. He looked into derelict houses: a lathered shaving brush—the owner was in the middle of shaving; a laid table and a bowl—the inmates were in the middle of supper. In the Town Hall papers were lying on the burgomaster's desk—he was in the middle of signing them. Dmitri Alexeyevich closely examined every detail of this life that was alien to him. They fixed themselves up very nicely, it can't be denied, nice bathrooms, neat kitchens. A peasant's house, but I wouldn't say no to a bed like that. . . . But what spiritual poverty! A bookshelf, beautiful bindings—all very nice, but when you open a book you find it's such rot that you want to go and wash your hands. *Race Hygiene*, *Geopolitics*, *Mein Kampf*, a detective story. On the wall the inevitable portrait of the Lunatic-in-Chief. Sentimental oleographs, money boxes, vases, china kittens and pug dogs. Rhymed maxims: "Good behaviour ensures sweet slumber," "To be precise makes a person nice," "If God you love you'll be enriched from above." On a table Dmitri Alexeyevich saw an ashtray shaped like a W.C. pan with the inscription: "For cigarette ash only." He flew into a rage and dashed the ashtray to the floor; he felt as though he had been subjected to a personal insult. So this is where the colts came from! They cackled, dropped pfennigs into their money boxes, admired pug dogs, exercised their wit—that ashtray alone speaks volumes, poetized "sweet slumber" (and that after Heine!) and then went after other people's oil, and incidentally a fur coat for the wife, befouled the whole world, spat from the top of the Eiffel Tower, defecated in the Acropolis and wanted to bestow their "culture" upon us—hang ten and leave the eleventh to lick their boots.

Then Krylov saw towns in which there were many inhabitants. They peeped furtively out of their windows, timidly crept out of their

courtyards, humbly greeted our men, began to clear the roads, hauled out stranded trucks and kept on repeating hurriedly: "It wasn't our fault . . . it was the S.S. . . . We are humble folk." . . .

Near the Soviet Kommandatur a crowd of Germans were reading a poster. Krylov asked the Commandant:

"What are they reading?"

"An order. We had it posted up as soon as we arrived here yesterday. . . ."

"What does it say?"

The Captain looked embarrassed:

"Really, I haven't read it. We got here last night very tired. I ordered it to be posted up, flopped on a couch and fell asleep. . . ."

But the Germans already knew every paragraph by heart—what was permitted and what was not.

Krylov tried to talk to the inhabitants, but they answered his questions in such a fawning manner that his face flushed and with a gesture of disgust he said: That's enough! . . .

Up till now he had unconsciously expected that on arriving in Germany he would find the clue to the tragedy, to the riddle of Oswięcim and Majdanek. But all he saw were clean curtains, cowed and frightened inhabitants, ruins, garbage and feathers—a murky morning after a drunken spree, with vomit and broken crockery.

In one town the head doctor of a hospital approached him:

"Permit me to introduce myself, Herr Major. I am Dr. Eppen. I want to appeal to you for assistance—my patients have no bread. I am not a Nazi, I am a physician, and I have always disapproved of extremes. . . ."

Krylov arranged for a supply of bread for the patients. Dr. Eppen said:

"Thank you. Science stands above political strife. We are not to blame. . . ."

"I have heard that a thousand times. Can you speak to me as man to man, or not? I will not arrest you, that's not my business, do you understand? . . . You say that science is above politics. That sounds very nice and fine. But your German physicians bred typhus-bearing lice on Jews. Now, is that 'above politics'?"

"I haven't heard anything about that, Herr Major, but the traditions of our science. . . ."

"Traditions? I was a surgeon in the last war too, I went straight from the university to the front. I remember reading, after the war, a book by Professor Jürgens, it was sent from Berlin. In that book the professor related that he had made tests on Russian prisoners of war to see whether lice were indeed the only carriers of typhus. In the first place, that professor was an ignoramus—I was still a student when the French epidemiologist Nicole published his data—he had conducted experiments on guinea pigs. And in the second place he was a brute—

he anticipated your Gestapo. Now, you are a physician. What do you think of such 'scientists'?"

"Really, I don't know what to say.... I am not an epidemiologist, I am an ordinary therapist. I can only admire your erudition. If all Russian physicians are like you, your science will make great progress...."

"I am not fishing for compliments. Stop wriggling! I ask you, what is your opinion of the practice of taking a man—Jew or Russian, prisoner of war or Negro, it makes no difference—and experimenting on him as if he were a guinea pig?"

"I have always been remote from politics, Herr Major. I only want to assure you that the science of medicine is on a very high level in our country. We heal the patient's body without troubling about his ideas. I have treated Nazis, but their program does not interest me. I think it was only political conceptions that divided us from the Russians. But what surprises me, Herr Major, is that you put representatives of the Aryans on a par with Jews and Negroes. Even the science of medicine has to take certain specific features into account...."

"That's enough!" shouted Krylov. "The rest is clear. You say you are a therapist? You are nothing of the kind. You are a vet. You have been treating colts, and you have become a horse doctor...."

Again and again Krylov asked himself: how could a great civilized nation, possessing universities, splendid dispensaries and beautiful monuments, have sunk so low? For the Germans he came in contact with he felt anger and pity. Perhaps that "therapist" had done no harm, but one could not say that he was innocent—he no sooner started talking than he came out with the race theory. That shows that he too might have tortured prisoners of war; he simply did not have occasion to.... They are all infected with it. And there is no one to call to book. I can't go and bawl at that old fellow: why did your grandsons burn little children in Trostyanets? The old fellow is to be pitied, if anything. I am particularly sorry for the children.... There they are, wandering on the road again. Running away, not knowing where to.... I am afraid the minor culprits will be made to answer for it. The real criminals will go into hiding. Not Hitler, and not Goering, it will be difficult for them to hide, but there are a million deliberate scoundrels, they will camouflage themselves—one will pose as a Communist, another as a democrat, a third as a pious churchgoer, a fourth as a vegetarian.... Who will suffer most? Those who are really the little people, those with large families, the aged, the children....

Krylov saw our soldiers entering Germany, unable to talk because of the hatred burning in their hearts. Each had his own grief—a brother killed, a daughter who had been deported, a house burnt down; they had all seen Trostyanets and Ponary.... They had shouted: "We will avenge them!" They had written on the signposts: "Here begins the accursed lair!" But when they saw the panic-stricken refugees, their arms dropped

to their sides. Dmitri Alexeyevich remembered seeing a little soldier who had found a dressmaker's dummy in the square—it had a rosy, smiling face, and had stood in the window of a dressmaker's shop. The soldier was lunging at the dummy with his bayonet; the dummy kept smiling, but the soldier was almost weeping with rage.

"What silly game are you up to?" Krylov had asked him.

The soldier had answered in a low voice:

"I'm from Byelorussia. . . . Those vipers killed everybody there. . . ."

He could not raise his hand against the inhabitants of the town, so he vented his rage upon the plastics dummy. Dmitri Alexeyevich heaved a sigh: it's human—foolish, but understandable.

The army was moving westward with increasing speed. Even the Germans now realized that the climax was near. They bowed still lower, informed against each other: "Müller had a Russian servant girl, he used to punish her," "Görnitz has two sons in the S.S.," "Don't believe what Schmidt says, he has been in the party since nineteen thirty-two." . . . A repugnant whispering rang in one's ears. A cold north wind was blowing, but there was no snow. Dmitri Alexeyevich sneezed, swore, but worked without stopping: there was no lack of wounded. The Germans knew that the game was up, but they obeyed the order to resist.

The nearer he drew to Berlin the more intensely Krylov pondered over the meaning of what he had gone through. He had recently turned fifty-five and had been in the war for three and a half years without a break, his health was shaken; he would say to himself: I puff like an antedeluvian "G.A.Z." car. I hear they have cleared them all out of Moscow because they spoiled the picture. . . . He suffered from insomnia due to fatigue: he would fall asleep, wake an hour later and lie and think. Ruins all the way from Voronezh to Königsberg, that's the first result. I have not seen what lies beyond that, but it is easy to picture—ruins from Königsberg to Havre. So many people killed and mutilated that the mind cannot grasp the number. Women bore them, gave birth to them and reared them. And then these colts decided that they were supermen. . . . Perhaps they have killed a budding Pushkin, killed a Newton in his cradle with their "V's," and burned a three-year-old Marx in Majdanek. No use talking about justice; there is no punishment to fit this crime. . . . This nightmare is coming to an end, they will no doubt surrender in the summer. But does it mean as my old mother used to say: "The wind returns to its starting place"? No, there is a different meaning in this. . . . Two worlds came into collision: reason and superstition, the idea of fraternity and that of these colts—thoroughbreds (that idiot at the hospital believes in it), their social system and ours. And I will add—they have splendid microscopes, even some kind of a pipifax that you can use instead of note paper, lots of things, and clever things too, they are stupid not because they are Germans, but because they were doped. And they went out to fight. This had to be, everything

was tending towards it. The fascists were prompted not only by greed, they were prompted also by malice and fear—they were afraid we would dress more decently, that we would build houses, even manufacture pipifax, and then it would turn out that we had both people and pants. That didn't suit them. They have no people; they have colts in pants. Our winning the war will decide everything. The historians will write: "Until 1942 the world had little confidence in what was called the greatest experiment of the age." I remember the American who came to visit me at the beginning of the war, he showed me his fountain pen. He said: "Russia is only an episode. Our country is on a high level of technical development, so it is we who are going to win." . . . I wonder what he is thinking now. But a fellow like that can't think; he too is a colt, but of a different colour. Probably there are people among them who think. Perhaps they are talking nonsense only to deceive the public. but actually, they understand. They understand who won, and why. . . . That is the meaning of this war; we have not only saved the village of Kozyi Vysyelki, say, from some Sonderführer, we have saved the new age—ours and the French, and the American. . . .

Krylov was told that two German Communists had been found in the prison, elderly men, exhausted, could barely keep on their feet. They were taken to the hospital. Krylov was enthused. Only two, but that doesn't matter. The important thing is that some decent ones have been found. It is a relief. . . .

One of the Communists had formerly been a printer's compositor; at forty-eight he looked an old man. He told Krylov that he had been in prison for seven years. His son was tortured to death in Dachau.

"I shall probably die soon," he said. "I can't eat anything. No sooner do I take anything into my mouth than I begin to vomit. But I am glad I have lived to see the hammer and sickle. . . . I was arrested because I said: You can shout as much as you like, but the Communists will win."

"You are not going to die, don't you dare!" roared Krylov. "I will cure you. But first let me shake hands with you. Do you think I care that you are a German? You can be the devil as far as I am concerned. The important thing is that you are a decent man. . . ."

The other Communist—formerly a schoolteacher—said:

"It is very hard to be a German now. I hate the Nazis. I have been in prison since nineteen thirty-seven. I have had no hand in what they have done, neither directly nor indirectly, but for all that, I feel responsible. This will hang over us. . . ."

Krylov became lost in thought and then he said softly:

"You are right, it's harder for you. . . . But if you look ahead, you will see happiness for yourselves too. You and I are no longer young, but we are Communists, so it is our duty to look ahead."

On returning to the hospital Krylov went to see Captain Solo-veichik. Krylov had fought for him for five days and had saved his

arm—gangrene had set in, but the captain contracted pneumonia. At one moment he was in a stupor, at another he talked feverishly: about his wife, about Gomel, said that he must go to work—something about lumber, matches, some kind of a plaster, Pavlik had to be put on his feet. . . . For some reason Krylov had at once taken a liking to him. Dmitri Alexeyevich was extremely worried: will he pull through or not? The captain died in the middle of the night.

Krylov went into the garden. The night was cold. He looked at the stars, and thought to himself vaguely: they are the same everywhere. . . . I am in the fresh air, but I find it hard to breathe, my shoulder aches, my motor is obviously giving out. . . . Then he remembered that near Minsk he had seen an old man knocking some logs together, building a hut. Krylov had asked him: "Building yourself a house?" The old man answered: "No. There's only me and my old wife, nobody else left. How much longer have we got to live? We can live in somebody else's house. But there's a soldier's wife here, with children. I am building this for her." . . . Varya is dead. Natasha has Vasya. But I must go on living—to knock logs together. . . . The people, the nation. . . . We'll creak along yet, Dmitri Alexeyevich!

Guns roared. In the distance the sky was a murky red. The advance was continuing.

* 22 *

Sergeant Helmut Reiner was on leave. He was at home when the tragedy started. Only three days before he had believed that the Reds would be stopped. After all, this is not a frontier town. The Russians invaded us during the last war, too, but Hindenburg smashed them up. Reiner was sixteen then, and longed to go to the front. Now he was forty-seven, and at that age it is nice to sit by the fireside and tell the children what it was like "when we were young." But Reiner had been called up a year before and sent to Baranovichi, where he had guarded the railway track against bandits. He had taken part in skirmishes with partisans. On one occasion he fled and ran six kilometres without stopping; that was not a job for a man near fifty. He barely escaped from Baranovichi. At last he had a stroke of luck; he was struck down by typhus, spent six weeks in hospital and then got leave. When he saw his native town again he was overcome by emotion: here he grew up, married, and had lived all his life; he knew everybody in the town, all the lime trees in the park, and all the signboards. His tobacco shop in the principal square, opposite the Town Hall, was once regarded as the best in the whole district. Reiner was a connoisseur of cigars; he did not chase after colourful labels, he got his supplies direct from Hamburg and Bremen. He had regular customers: the Burgomaster, Herr Seidel, who owned a sawmill and a large estate, the curator of the museum,

Schmiedke, the führer of the local organization—in short, all the notables in the town. The little town was unharmed, it had never been bombed, but for all that Reiner did not recognize it; all the people had lost their heads. Earlier a lot of people had arrived here from Western Germany, in quest of a quiet spot where there were no air raids. These refugees were the first to give way to panic; they yelled that bombs were preferable to Russians and besieged the overcrowded trains that arrived from the frontier districts. Then the panic spread to the native inhabitants of the town. Schmiedke demanded that the men should not be allowed to leave, that they should join the Volkssturm. The Burgomaster said there would be a “repetition of the miracle of Tannenberg,” but he himself left the town at night in his car. Reiner was dismayed. On reflection, it seemed to him that the cause of his misfortune was his joy at meeting his family; they were all alive and well—his flabby, middle-aged wife Emma, and his four daughters, the oldest of whom, Anna, had recently turned sixteen, and the youngest, Greta, had been born on the day mourning was proclaimed for the Stalingrad disaster. But perhaps Reiner did not go away in time because, being on leave, he was relieved of the severe worries of the soldier: he had jeered at the panic and had said: this is not Baranovichi! Whatever the reason, he was left stranded, and when, two days ago, he did decide to leave, even on foot, it was too late—Heinrich told him that the Russians had cut off all the roads.

For two days Reiner was panic-stricken: at one moment he believed a miracle would happen, at another he would sit dumbstruck with horror. This morning he realized that all hope was lost. About a hundred S.S. men were left in the town; they collared the rum in the wine cellar in the Town Hall, got drunk and yelled that they would never surrender. A shell burst in the square outside the tobacco shop.

“What shall we do?” Reiner asked Heinrich

“Wait. . . I am not afraid of their coming. I was a Social-Democrat before nineteen thirty-two. . .”

Reiner was aware that Heinrich was afraid of the Russians, but for all that, he envied him. Heinrich does not belong to the party. . . . But they will hang me. I joined in nineteen thirty-five, when everybody else did. . . . Then, I have been in Russia. we were sent to subdue villages where bandits were hiding. . . . We played havoc there. Now I’ll have to answer for it. . . . The newspapers write that the Russians are committing frightful atrocities. Schmiedke said: “There hasn’t been anything like it in history.”. . . They will hang me, rape Anna, and they may kill Emma. Even if they do not kill her, she will be unable to support the children. The shop is lost. . . . All is lost. . . .

“We must commit suicide,” he said to Emma. “We have no other alternative. . . .”

Emma shrieked:

"Good God! Do you know what you are talking about? How can we leave our little children?..."

"With the children..."

Emma burst into tears:

"You have gone mad! ... You frighten me!..."

He stroked her thin grey hair:

"I was joking."

Emma cooked a fine dinner: she wanted to soothe her husband and give the children a treat; and besides, it was no use hoarding the provisions, the Russians would no doubt take everything. She boiled some pork, cabbage with caraway seed, and a pudding, for which she spared neither eggs nor jam. She also brought out a bottle of kümmel she had saved. Reiner brightened up, his face became flushed, he teased Anna: "Otto is courting you, but he stammers, and he'll never be able to propose to you." ... Emma was delighted: Helmut has recovered his composure.

Late in the afternoon the Russians occupied the town.

Osip walked into the spacious study of Seidel, the sawmill owner, hung his cap on a deer's horn and swore. Well, I never thought I would have to be the Commandant of a German town! He had tried to convince the member of the Military Council that it would be more advisable to appoint somebody else, but in vain. ... There was only one consolation—he promised to relieve him in a week's time. For the time being, his regiment was in the second echelon. ...

He looked round at the walls with disgust. Whose portrait is that? A smug face, turned up moustache, and a high collar supporting the cheeks. Coats of arms with unicorns. All trash. ... Everything disgusted him here, he longed for Kiev. I wish I was going home soon! ... And every time that thought flashed through his mind, his heart shrank: I have no home. ...

In spite of what he had told the member of the Military Council, Osip proved to be a good Commandant: he possessed organizing ability and experience—what does a cost accountant not have to do when he is put on a construction job! ... He ordered the streets to be cleaned; he sent out patrols (it was not his regiment that was stationed here, and the men might get drunk), and to Heinrich, who turned up with his Socialist Party ticket, he said:

"All right. ... This is not election time. I'll tell you what. There are a lot of ownerless cows roaming about around the town, send your girls to round them up and then tend them. ... We'll set some of the cows apart to supply milk for the children. Do you understand me? Where is the curator of the museum?"

"He scooted. He is a reactionary, and when I spoke up in defence of the Weimar Constitution. ..."

"I understand. What's in the museum, Rembrandts, or the Führer's hangers-on?"

"Oh, lots of exhibits, collections of butterflies, regimental colours, a view of Tannenberg, I have never been there myself, I was always busy attending meetings of anti-fascist organizations...."

Osip had a job to get him out of the room.

Then came Junior Lieutenant Vorobyov with a little girl.

"What a tribe this is, Comrade Major!... See this kiddie?... We went into a house near the Town Hall. Dead bodies were lying on the floor—several girls, a woman, and a soldier. And this kid was howling like blue murder.... We asked the neighbours, and it appeared that this German had shot his own wife and children. What a skunk, eh?... I don't know how this kiddie survived. Either he couldn't bring himself to shoot her, or he missed.... They are not human, that's what I say!... What shall I do with this kid?"

"Get her fixed up with some German family.... Wait a minute, she must be hungry. I'll tell Nastya to give her something to eat. Let her stay here for the time being. Nastya will look after her—this is an immense house, that scoundrel had about twenty rooms...."

When Vorobyov went away Osip took the little girl to Nastya, then returned to the study, got up on the writing desk, removed the portrait and put it on the floor, face to the wall.

He worked all day: walked through the town, went into the museum and the Town Hall, found the files of the Gestapo and interrogated the S.S. men who by this time had changed into civvies. In the evening, while he was having supper, the little girl came in. With an effort he recalled the German words:

"What is your name?"

"Greta...."

The little girl was shy at first, but seeing Osip smile, she trustfully climbed on to his knee. He played "clap your hands" with her.... She babbled something, but he did not understand her. He felt good and at the same time conscious of an acute pain—all the time he was thinking of Alya. This is what she was like when he left Kiev.... Perhaps it was Greta's father who killed her?... He gazed tenderly and sadly at the sleepy child and then carried her off to Nastya.

Osip served as Commandant for ten days. All the inhabitants knew him well. On meeting him they would bow respectfully and say with a smile: "Good day, Herr Kommandant." He would look at them without malice and without sympathy; he could not convince himself that these were humans; he believed neither their smiles nor their humility, nor Heinrich, who assured him that the town "was almost red." He believed nobody and nothing in this town. Only when he looked at Greta did his eyes become mild and sad.

The regiment went on further. Osip was sitting at the field tele-

phone in a village house. The Germans were trying to hold an old castle that overlooked the town. Osip shouted:

"Is that Zakharenko? Can you hear me? Pepper them a bit harder..."

Another town—clean and alien... February, and it was already spring—Osip saw a snowdrop in the garden. How wonderful the spring is in Kiev, nothing like it anywhere! Raya was fond of violets... It will soon be all up with the Fritzes now—they can't hold out for more than a month or two... But what will I do when it's over? I have nobody left... What do you mean, nobody left?... A hundred and eighty million... I will work—that has remained to me. I will invite Minayev and Olga to come and visit me, let them see how beautiful Kiev is. I will take them to the park. They will stroll through it as I used to with Raya... There are always lots of children in the park. They chirp and twitter... I will listen to them for a while, and then go to work...

* 23 *

"The Germans won't be able to sleep comfortably for a long time now," said Minayev to Olga. "They have nothing to cover themselves with; they have used up all the white feathers of their quilts and have cut up their sheets for white flags..."

The German forces continued to offer desperate resistance. Every town had to be captured by storm. Sometimes civilians fired from the windows. But as soon as the Soviet troops reached the centre of a town everything changed by magic, like in a fairy tale. The inhabitants, even those who had been shooting an hour before, became transformed into martyrs who had suffered at the hands of Hitler. They feverishly cut up their bed sheets; pieces of white cloth fluttered on all the house fronts and from the windows; scraps were used for white arm bands.

People who had languished in captivity came pouring into the streets: Ukrainian girls whom Christina, or some other vicious German woman, had slapped; slave women who had cried their eyes out in underground factories or in pigsties belonging to florid-faced pig breeders; French prisoners of war who for five years had toiled in the mines in Silesia; Englishmen and Americans who had been the aristocrats in German captivity; former frequenters of Warsaw cafés who had been transformed into navvies, and Prague college lecturers who had been cleaning soldiers' latrines. Whom did not Minayev meet? A Dutch actor whom the Germans had arrested because his audience had interrupted by applause a monologue by one of Shakespeare's heroes, a Norwegian parson who had failed in proper time to hold a memorial service for von Paulius' men, and a Milan lawyer who had belatedly, but vociferously, quarrelled with his Duce. Minayev related:

"I even saw some Australians. They were walking along and rejoicing as if they were not antipodes, but from somewhere in Penza..."

Minayev was joking, but in his heart he was moved by this unprecedented spectacle: we are really liberating people, you can't deny it! Did I ever think when I was on that blasted mound that I would get to Germany and that some lanky American from the State of Michigan would call out to me: "Thank you"?... Minayev talked to that American; he was the son of a Czech immigrant and understood Russian.

"It's fine you got here!" exclaimed the American. "I was expecting Patton to liberate us, but I looked and saw it was you Russians.... But the main thing is that we have met, isn't that right?"

"Yes, that's right," answered Minayev. He thought for a moment and then said with a smile: "Do you know when I very much wanted to meet you? In September nineteen forty-two. I was roaming in the steppe then, it was hot and very unpleasant, let me tell you.... And the thought occurred to me: how nice it would be to meet the Americans now. I knew, of course, that you were jolly fellows and were fond of jazz. I like it too.... I thought to myself: we'll have some fun together. But that meeting didn't come off.... I am very pleased we have liberated you and that we have met now, in Brandenburg. Better late than never. The funny thing is that women can't understand that. One of them said to me quite bluntly: better never than late...."

The American roared with laughter:

"Boy, you are some joker! Our folks say the Reds never laugh...."

Minayev's men went on further. Short, sharp battles were fought. Scraps of bedsheets appeared. The men drank schnapps and swore. They were all burning with the impatience of the last hours of the climax.

And liberated people streamed along the roads. The Americans and English travelled light. The Americans were boisterous, wanted to slap every Russian on the back, paid compliments to the girls, admired the Soviet tanks and demanded of lieutenants they met that they be immediately provided with lodgings and a shower bath and then be sent off to Oklahoma, or Nebraska. The English were supercilious and reserved; with reserve they rejoiced at their freedom, and with reserve longed for their five o'clock tea. The most numerous were the French. Many of them rode on German bicycles, carrying a purloined goose, a warm sweater for the first postwar winter, or an accordion. They had quickly weighed up the situation, realized that the Russians had no time to bother with them, wended their way eastward on their own accord and in an instant converted a stray pig or sheep into such a savoury ragoût that the Russians whom they treated to a meal exclaimed: "What a nation! They are all cooks!"...

One day Minayev came upon such a feast. His regiment was held up at a place for a week: they said that artillery was being drawn up. Suddenly, Minayev saw a German cottage with a flaring signboard:

"Devil's Kitchen Restaurant. For the Allied Forces." It transpired that some liberated Frenchmen were having a bit of fun. One of them spoke a little Russian: he had worked at a factory for two years with Soviet prisoners. They treated Minayev to a mysterious dish and rum. Then the Frenchmen sang, very loudly and very discordantly; it was a smutty song, but the melody sounded like a chant for the dead. When they had all had their fill of eating, drinking and bawling, the Frenchman who spoke Russian sat down beside Minayev and began to question him about Russia. Minayev was amazed: the Frenchman knew about the Dnieper Power Plant, about the Moscow Metro, and about Mayakovsky's poetry; several times he interrupted Minayev to put in some information of his own.

"How do you know about all this? Did you hear it from our war prisoners?"

"No, I heard it in France. I was a student, but even among our students there were those who were eager to hear the truth about the Soviet Union. I say 'even' because the students in our country are not advanced. . . . When the war broke out I joined an underground organization. Later I was obliged to leave Paris and go to Marseilles. There I took part in partisan operations; we attacked a German club, liberated arrested comrades. When the Germans entered Marseilles, we lived for one thing—Stalingrad. My chum Nico killed a German lieutenant and pinned a note on his chest: 'In honour of Stalingrad.' . . ."

"We didn't know that when we were there. . . . Why, I was at Stalingrad all the time—on one lousy hummock. . . ."

The Frenchman was astonished and said something to his comrades; they all came up and stared at Minayev: a Russian who had been in Stalingrad! Minayev laughed:

"What's surprising about it? I doubt whether you will meet a German here who has been at Stalingrad. You will find any number of our men, though. . . . I like the way your Nico shot a Fritz in honour of Stalingrad. That was better than sending telegrams. . . ."

"It wasn't we who sent the telegrams. Nico was shot—he was captured a month later. He was a Communist before the war. I have been a Communist since nineteen forty-one. . . ."

Minayev, in his turn, looked at the Frenchman in astonishment:

"I have never spoken to a Communist from the other side before. Are there many in France who think like you?"

"About a third, another third think the opposite, almost like the Germans. . . ."

"But what about the third third?"

"They don't think at all."

"How did you come to think that way? . . ."

"From the opposite. . . . I love my father very much. He is the

most honest of men but a confirmed sceptic, I think people of his type can be met with only in France. Since my childhood I have heard him say: 'People are skunks. Among dogs you may come across some decent ones who will not snatch a bone from a pup, nor boast that they are thoroughbred St. Bernards. But I haven't met such among humans.' He used to say: 'There have been three and a half revolutions in France (he regarded the eighteen hundred and thirty revolution only as half a revolution). What's the result? In the reign of Louis a duke ranked higher than a marquis, and a marquis higher than a count. Today the quotations are different: Rio Tinto, Royal Dutch, Mexican Eagle.' ... My father thought that in this way he would frighten me away from politics, but he was the first to open my eyes. ... France's misfortune is that scepticism has become a faith, there are actually fanatical sceptics. My father is a medical man, he has to deal with sick people, and he argues this way: 'I cure a man of pneumonia, later he dies of inflammation of the kidneys. Once upon a time people died of the plague. Everybody rejoiced: the scourge of mankind has been removed, and then people began to die of cancer. When cancer is vanquished, some new scourge will appear. ...' I am a Frenchman, too, I like a bit of fun. I know that there are spots on the sun too, but I can't be content with irony. We have been turning our clothes too long; it's time to make new ones. Comrades have died in my arms in France, and here too, in the camp. I said good-bye to a girl in Marseilles, we arranged to go bathing next day, but she was arrested by the Gestapo and tortured to death. Did she die in order that Daladier should again oust Reynaud, or that Reynaud should oust Blum? No, there must be a big change now. ..."

Saying good-bye to Minayev, he said:

"If you ever get to Paris I will give you a better treat than we gave you today. I'll introduce you to good comrades. I'll give you my address. ... My name is René Morillot."

Minayev wrote to his Mum:

"Last night I had supper with some Frenchmen. They regaled me with some supernatural dish and said it was a common duck which had got fed up with quacking in a German pond, but I have a quiet suspicion that it was a mysterious hash of ox and frogs. But it is not the supper I want to write about. When things were at their worst with us you wrote and told me that we must not despair because our country is very big. You are absolutely right. But last night I learned that our country is much bigger than our country. When I get home I will explain this to you in a short lecture on the international situation. Although we are fairly near to Berlin, we still have some fighting to do—the Germans are very slow-thinking, but we can't wait, everyone of us has his own reason for being in a hurry. I, for example, want to throw my arms around you as soon as possible. Olya sends her greetings and asks me to say that she is well and happy. I am a bit doubtful about the latter—

she is being tormented to death by the German women who insist on addressing her as 'Führerin,' and by your incorrigible Mitka."

The night was raw; it smacked of the sea and of spring—an anxious night in March. Minayev lay for a long time thinking about the future of his generation, and as he dozed off he made up his mind that that future would be a troubled one, but that he would not exchange that troubled future for anything.

* 24 *

Bill Coster had been out of luck lately. He arrived in France in the winter. The Army was marking time. He asked himself: What am I to write a thousand words about? True, lots of interesting things were happening. If he were to write about how Montgomery was trying to outwit Bradley, his readers would be delighted. But he couldn't do that—the censor would suppress the story. The soldiers were boozing and abusing the French: "a dirty lot, stink of garlic, too much big talk," and then they want to know: "Why have we been brought here? If we've got to fight, better fight the Japs."... But you couldn't write about that, either....

Spring came; fighting commenced. A multitude of journalists arrived. They were obliged to sing in chorus, but Bill was not a chorister; he would spoil his reputation that way. On top of that, bad luck dogged his footsteps: he could never guess where the next sensation would burst—he missed both Cologne and the Remagen Bridge. He had to write from hearsay, and his story lacked colour, anecdote, pep.

He decided to go to Paris—he would nose around there and perhaps find something—there were rumours that the Germans were taking soundings in the Vatican. If the worst comes to the worst, he could write a story about the love between the actress Xavier and an airman who had lost a leg. Readers like that sort of thing. Nothing sentimental could be sent from Germany—the censor wouldn't let anything through—the order was: no fraternization with the population. In Kuibyshev I was mad with the Russians, but our military authorities are no better. One of them told me that I must not report the capture of a town until it is reported by Headquarters. So what is a self-respecting journalist to do?

In Paris he spent a pleasant night with a girl whom he later described as "super-spicy." That girl said to him:

"I keep company only with Americans now. The English are so stingy, and our fellows haven't got a sou. It's a bad business...."

To comfort her Bill said:

"Never mind, things will be better soon."

"I am afraid not. There are too many Communists about, and the workers won't work. They waste their time discussing politics, no wonder the employers are closing their factories. The shopkeepers are hoarding

their goods. Nobody believes that things are going to be better. On the contrary. . . . Kiki has found a nice American who has promised to take her to New York. I only fall in with scamps like you. . . .”

She yawned. Bill wanted to answer her, but he saw that she was already asleep. He could not fall asleep. He pondered over the picture the girl had drawn. Suddenly he jumped up: an idea!—and forthwith he wrote the following cable to his editor: “Griffith remaining at front. Propose write series sensational articles general heading: ‘Red Noose Round France’s Neck’—mob terrorism, economic chaos. Interviews: opinions businessmen, politicians, police, man in street.” He gave the girl five dollars over and above what was coming to her and, in addition, a carton of cigarettes—he stood for honesty in business. Two days later he received congratulations from his editor.

Lawyer Garcey related to Bill how the F.F.I. had searched the apartment of a respectable businessman. Bill wrote a vivid story about it: at night a gang of Communists force their way into the apartment, tear the bedclothes off the young woman, molest her, smash a china statuette of the Virgin on the pretext that dollars are concealed inside it and carry away the family heirlooms. He wound up the article with the question: “Is this what the heroes of Ohio and Texas died for?” Garcey told him that wholesale arrests were taking place and went on to say:

“What are thousands of people being accused of? Not of committing crimes, but simply of having belonged to the militia or to the P.P.F. This is utter repudiation of law. There has been nothing like this in France since the days of Robespierre. . . .”

Bill told his readers how a pale-faced girl said farewell to life through her prison bars only because she had said to a Communist: “I will never go with you. My ideal is not tyranny, but justice and freedom such as reign in the great transatlantic republic.”

Garcey introduced Bill to Pinaud: he proved to be a storehouse of information. Bill sent an article demonstrating by means of dry statistics how production was dropping owing to the corrupting influence of the Communists. He did not mind dabbling in dull economics if the salvation of Europe, and hence, the prosperity of America, depended upon it, but now he had to write something picturesque, so he asked Pinaud to introduce him to an “amusing Frenchman.” Pinaud thought for a while: introduce him to Lancier, perhaps. A chatterbox like that would be a perfect windfall for a journalist. . . .

Although six months had passed since Paris was liberated, Lancier had not yet recovered his peace of mind. In fact, he was convinced that he would never know peace again—Marceline had died in time, the past cannot be resurrected.

There were quiet days when Lancier remembered his collections, smiled over his snuff boxes and Negro idols. One day he said to Marthe:

“Do you know what’s lacking at Corbeille? The Sudan goat. I know

it's impossible to get another one now. Perhaps we ought to get an ordinary kid? They are such graceful things...."

But these calm moments gave way to fits of alarm. Before the war Lancier could not bear hearing politics discussed in his presence, but now, he himself started arguments and suddenly he would shout: "The municipal elections must be postponed!"... Marthe would scold him and say: "What are you getting excited about? It's not your business."... He would answer: "You did not know me in my happy days. They say that bad currency eliminates good currency. In my head, politics are eliminating lofty ideas."

His factory was running three days a week: there was a shortage of raw materials and fuel. Lancier grumbled: why aren't things running into their groove? He imagined that the war had ended long ago, the Boches were defeated. What difference did it make what German town the Americans captured yesterday? That was a matter only military men could be interested in. But here, in Paris, things were very bad. People simply couldn't understand how they had managed to survive the winter. The winter had been very cold and there had been no fuel. It was warm now, but there were queues everywhere, and women were complaining that it was impossible to procure even bare necessities. Prices on the black market were soaring. The workers were saying that this must be stopped. It was obvious that if the municipal elections were held, the Communists would win. Had it been worth while fighting heroically against the Boches only to fall under the yoke of our own barbarians?...

When Pinaud told Lancier that a well-known American journalist wanted to be introduced to him, Lancier became pettish:

"What for? Their newspapers are sillier than ours. If he were an author, it would be different...."

"The press plays a big role in America, and it is in our interest that the Americans should know about our difficulties—they alone can help us. Coster has been told that there is not a man with a subtler mind than yours in the business world and he is simply burning with desire to interview you. Give him an hour of your time...."

"An hour! Oh no! I am convinced he is a savage, like all his countrymen. I tell you what, I'll invite him to supper and let him see what French culture is like. Marthe's younger sister Claire is coming from Poitiers to visit us tomorrow. We will celebrate this humble family event. I count on you and on Madame Pinaud coming, cher ami...."

Lancier began to draw up the menu. Not such a simple matter nowadays; you have to keep on asking Marthe: "Is it possible to get?" But a great artist can create a picture out of nothing.... Lancier decided on fish quenelles and stuffed chicken.

He decorated the table with flowers and crossed pennants—American and French. Claire exclaimed:

"How beautiful! It helps you to forget the horrors we are living through..."

She was a pretty, cheerful girl who for five years had been waiting for happiness. Her sweetheart was a prisoner of war. She worked in an office, and at night she cried. Bill appraised her at once; he thought to himself: If I weren't so busy, I'd take up with that cutie, but I am not here for amusement. He began to study the host: he certainly is a picturesque figure....

Suddenly Lancier mournfully ran his eye round the table: he recalled his prewar suppers. Could Pinaud be compared with Dumas, or with Nivelles? Of course, Nivelles ended up badly, but after all, he is not Pinaud, who can only talk business and solemnly blow his nose. And that American.... I was right, they are savages. As soon as he came in he put his feet on the smoking table. Drank wine before supper, and takes ice cold water with his quenelles. Smokes during the meal, which kills the taste of the food. What's the use of treating him to choice dishes? He is used to his canned food. And how brazenly he laughs! Ignoramus! ... That Russian who was here before the war was far more refined, he behaved modestly and appreciated my miniatures. But this one! When I showed him my Récamier he said: "There's lots like these in the New York antiquary shops. They ship them from France, and their price has dropped so low you can buy them at fifty dollars." ... Barbarian! Lancier did not, however, forget the laws of hospitality; he was courteous, kept Bill's wineglass filled, and readily answered all his questions.

• "I have been told that your son was killed in action. Was he in Leclerc's army?"

"No, he was killed in Russia. I am proud of him..."

"In Russia? Was he a Communist?"

"Never! He hated politics as much as I do. He wanted to liberate France from the Boches. He went to Russia long before the landing. I understand that gesture of his.... And then, Soviet Russia must not be confused with our Communists. The Russians have their own national aims..."

"I have been in Russia," said Bill. "There were no Frenchmen there then. I saw the Russians whom they were defending Moscow. They are fanatics who love their country, their horrible social system, and some prince, I have forgotten his name, Dmitri Nevsky, I think it is. At that time many were of the opinion that it was all up with the Russians, but I wrote that they would never surrender Moscow. You say they have their national aims. I agree. But perhaps their national aim is to seize the whole of Europe? Many people in America believe in the Russian menace.... I was told at Bradley's Headquarters that Montgomery wants to forestall the Russians and get to Berlin first. That's unfair, of course. The English like to pluck fruit from other people's trees. Either Patton or Hodges must enter Berlin. But better Monty than the Russians..."

"I think the Russians will get there before everybody," said Lancier. "Their social system may be horrible, but they are splendid fighters. During the occupation we used to rejoice at their victories."

"Naturally," said Bill. "We rejoiced too. You had a rough time under the Germans, eh?"

"Awful! . . ."

Lancier said this with profound feeling. It now seemed to him that he had never suffered so much as he had done during the occupation. Bill jotted something down in his notebook, mechanically swallowed a piece of chicken, picked up the bottle of cognac that was intended for the coffee, gulped down a large glassful and said:

"I suppose you did business with the Germans? Everybody here did. . . ."

This offended Lancier:

"I would like to see what the Americans would do if German columns were to march down Fifth Avenue. Yes, at first I believed Pétain. You believed him too. Your ambassador was in Vichy for two and a half years. I still believe that Pétain is an honest Frenchman. I fought under him at Verdun. He made a mistake. . . . We all resisted the best way we could. Look at Monsieur Pinaud. He is no romantic youth, but he was in the Resistance from nineteen forty-two, he risked his life. . . . And after that you hurl such a reproach at us! . . ."

Bill answered in an amicable tone:

"I didn't mean to offend you. A journalist is a provocateur. I was not expressing my own opinion, I repeated the silly stories that are current in America to hear you deny them. Personally, I love France, I think it is the most refined country one can imagine. But there is one thing I don't understand, Monsieur Lancier: how you got along with the Communists in the Resistance?"

Pinaud answered:

"One does not choose one's allies, you know that as well as we do. I could, in my turn, ask you how you get along with the Bolsheviks. The people in America are wrong in thinking that the Communists played the leading role. They know how to advertise themselves. It is enough to recall that they sat quiet in nineteen forty, and only raised a howl when Hitler attacked Russia. . . ."

Bill wrote all this down. Lancier wanted to invite him to taste the goat cheese that Marthe had procured with great difficulty, but suddenly he forgot about everything: he began to abuse the Communists. He himself did not understand why he hated them so much, he attributed it to his civic mindedness. Only once, when Marthe asked him whether he was afraid the Communists would take his factory from him, he answered in a low voice: "The factory! They took Mado from me. . . ."

Now he shouted:

"I saw those 'patriots' in nineteen thirty-nine, when the war started.

They stood up for the Russians. I said to Lejean at the time: 'You are not a Frenchman, you are a Tatar.' Later on, perhaps, fellows like Lejean preached war against the Boches, but I will never forgive him his treachery. . . . They want to make capital out of the blood of the martyrs, to exploit the ruins of Oradour to increase their vote. They are fanatics, they have split France from top to bottom, they have split every family. My heart is bleeding. . . ."

Pinaud had told Bill that Lancier's daughter was a Communist and that was why Bill had been so eager to meet Lancier—he hoped to get material for a sensational story—a grey-haired father's tragedy. True, Lancier's outward appearance was somewhat disappointing, but he quickly realized that even this could be used to hit off a point—the bon vivant who hides his paternal grief with a smile. . . . Pinaud had made him promise not to refer to him if Lancier's daughter were mentioned. Bill realized that this was the moment to put the question. He said:

"I have seen in a radical newspaper a portrait of a beautiful woman with the caption: 'Madeline Lancier.' Is that a relative of yours?"

"She is my daughter, Monsieur Coster." (There were tears in Lancier's voice. Marthe looked indignantly at the American. Pinaud had a fit of coughing. Claire said: "The air is thick with smoke," and got up to open the window.) "Yes, she is my daughter. . . . I have loved nobody as much as I love her, except poor Marceline. She could have been a splendid artist. Those pictures on the wall are her earliest paintings. . . . Marquet said she had talent. . . . But the Communists took her from me! I do not doubt her sincerity; but there is a gulf between us now. When she came to see me I mustered all my strength and bluntly asked her: 'Who is dearer to you—your father, or those lunatics? . . .'"

Lancier wiped his eyes with his serviette. Bill wrote without a pause.

When supper was over they put on their coats and went into the garden. It was a spring night. The first chestnut trees were already in bloom. Bill and Claire went on in front. The older people remained near the house. Lancier said to Pinaud:

"They are more savage than I thought they were. He has no idea what tact is. And what was the use of preparing stuffed chicken for him? Marthe slaved hard a whole day. . . . People like that should be fed on oats and corn. . . ."

Claire came back alone; later Bill came back and at once took his leave.

When the guests had gone Marthe went to her sister's room; Lancier reflected bitterly over the peace: two colossi had emerged victorious from the war—America and Communism. I don't even know which of them is the more frightful. . . . Marthe came in; usually calm, she was now extremely agitated:

"Maurice, you should not invite such people to the home of a respectable family. . . ."

This frightened Lancier:

"What did he do?"

"He insulted Claire. You have noticed how sensitive she is, haven't you? He began to molest her. She thought it was because he had had too much to drink and so she tried to make a joke of it. But he offered her his visiting card and said: 'If you come to me tomorrow evening, you'll get forty dollars.'... This is unheard of! And in a respectable home too!..."

Later, Marthe was sorry she had told Maurice about this incident. He could not sleep all night, roamed from room to room mumbling something to himself. Next morning he said to his wife:

"What do you think? Perhaps the best thing to do is to throw up everything and go to Gelinotte? We will live modestly, breed goats, rabbits and chickens. How much do you and I need? We are both no longer young. There, at least, there will be no Americans, no Communists, and no Pinaud. I am suffocating from the coarseness of life.... Only now do I appreciate the bliss of rural life! When Claire is married and brings us her little one, we will pet it as if it were our grandchild.... Perhaps Mado too will have pity on me and come to visit us for a few days. We will not talk about those damned politics.... We will talk about Marceline...."

Lancier did not dream of Gelinotte for long: Garcy invited him to lunch, and once again he plunged into the vortex of life in Paris.

Bill gave his next article the heading: "I Have Seen King Lear's Tears."

* 25 *

When, a year ago, Gerda to everyone's surprise, married lame Günther Speier, opinion was divided. Irma did not approve of her sister's choice. Manager of the Provisions Department—one met men like that in the ration card office, not in a bedroom; blows his nose loudly and belches at table, and an uglier creature I have never met. True, it's hard to live without a man, but Gerda is only two years older than I, when she dresses and makes up she is attractive, and besides, she has some savings. Why was she in such a hurry? Friedrich, Gerda's brother (he was then stationed in Biarritz), was angry about it: It's only a year since Keller is missing, and Gerda has already found a substitute. Suppose Johann turns up alive? True, she received notification of his death, but who knows what has become of the defenders of Stalingrad. After all, women are rotters; you go and fight for them, but they spring surprises like this on you!... Gerda's mother, on receiving her letter, remembered Johann and wept. But Gerda had acted wisely: she was thirty-one, with two children on her hands, and it was not so easy to get a husband now. Frau Frenzel envied her friend: she had chosen a husband

to suit the times. A Provisions Department was now more important than a university chair. It is sufficient to have supper with them to appreciate the reasons that had prompted Gerda. Others had love in their eyes; she had it on her table. . . . Herr Frenzel sighed and said to himself: Keller was a scientist, but what is Speier? A thief. I don't know, perhaps he does not steal, but they are all thieves. . . . To Gerda he said: "I welcome your decision, through you Speier will inherit the light that burned in Johann's skull." He could not understand why Gerda turned pale and gripped the door post when she heard the word "skull."

Gerda lived peacefully with Günther. True, on two occasions he got drunk and beat her, called her a "loose woman" who had married again while she had a "living husband"; but Gerda was not a child, she knew that men were illogical—they must either fight or vent their spite on a woman, and she forgave him the few bruises he gave her. She treated him as something indispensable: she could not support herself and two children without a husband.

Now, on recalling the past year of cohabitation she reflected: on the whole I could be happy. Günther is treating the children well and has promised that when the war ends we shall have a child. But the accursed war interfered again. . . . This is quite apart from air raids. Mama couldn't stand it any longer and went to an aunt in Breslau. At that time people said that it was quieter in the East. But she landed right in the thick of it. It is a hundred times more terrible there—the Russians have come. . . . What a good thing it is that I got rid of Olga in time, that witch might have killed me. In the autumn, even before the Russians invaded Germany, she became so insolent that she said to me: "You will answer for everything." . . . Günther said at the time that I shouldn't have struck her in the face with the key, I should have whipped her. He is sentimental. But perhaps he had taken a fancy to the slut. . . . I'll be glad if she has a broken nose for the rest of her life. But that does not make it easier for me now. What an endless horror! When you listen to the radio your head feels as if it is going to burst. The Russians are near Berlin. People say there are American tanks near Mainz. When people meet they don't greet each other but ask: "Where are they?"

Irma said to her sister:

"Couldn't you think of anything more foolish than marrying a Nazi?"

Martha Frenzel expressed herself more vaguely:

"My husband doesn't belong to the party. . . . Nor did Johann, as far as I remember. . . ."

Hitherto, Gerda had been little interested in Günther's political views; on weighing things up she had said to herself: he is in a good position, and he has a short leg, so he won't be sent to the front. Now she asked her husband:

"Why do you belong to the party?"

"What do you mean, why? I haven't been expelled..."

"I am asking you, why did you join?"

This riled Günther:

"You are all clever after the event. As if I was the only one to join... I was an ordinary bookkeeper, but under the Nazis I became a man of influence. I need not tell you that. The widow of a university lecturer who begged to go to bed with me... And now she asks 'why'? Who could tell that it would end like this? The Führer knows more than I do, but even he never thought things would turn out like this."

"Aren't you afraid you will be killed?"

"Why should I be afraid. I am not a party leader, I am an expert. Ration cards will be issued and flour stocks checked under the Americans too..."

Irma was afraid she would be sent out to dig trenches. She went to bed and persuaded the doctor to certify that she had malaria. She played the part so well that she actually shook with fever.

One day Günther came home and said:

"I bless the day I came to Heidelberg."

Gerda could not understand: what is he so pleased about? Everybody is saying the town will be bombarded by artillery soon.

"Where did you get drunk?"

He shook his head.

"I am glad I am here. You know that I lived in Dresden before the war; well, the Russians are sure to get there. I'd like to see old Karl Hünner now, cackling over his money box..."

Günther emitted a squeaky laugh.

Frenzel came in grumbling:

"Something inexplicable... Where's the Führer? His eagle eye must see this tragedy... The snakes of philistinism and the scorpions of Himmler are to blame..."

Günther said to him:

"Stop snivelling. Even cats, let alone dogs, have stopped thinking about the Führer. Everybody is interested in something else now: Who is coming here? I'm feeling good because I'm convinced the Americans are coming here. I will not talk about Berlin, or Dresden, it's a nightmare there. You can't imagine anything worse than the Reds. But I wouldn't exchange this apartment for the most luxurious mansion in Stuttgart."

"Why wouldn't you?" enquired Gerda.

"Because the French will get to Stuttgart. They are better than the Russians, but we can expect no good from them. Our forces haven't been in America, but they were in France four years. This is their return visit, so to speak. And in general, the French are degenerates. No wonder they are fond of Negroes. The Americans are fine fellows and real Aryans..."

Next day Günther came home with sensational news:

"They have gone out to meet them!"

"Who's gone out?"

"Eight of our officers. They stuck a Red Cross on their car." ...

"I don't understand a thing. Whom have they gone to meet?"

"Whom? Not the Führer, of course. The Americans. It is important that they should occupy the town at once. We can't allow the French to come here, can we? ... And there's lots of riffraff here—Russians, Poles, Frenchmen. Those fellows wouldn't be averse to arranging a massacre. Our representatives will guarantee that there will be no resistance. Every hour is precious. ..."

Ransacking her wardrobe, Gerda found a torn child's bed sheet and hung it out on the balcony.

Gerda liked the Americans, and Irma recovered at once; she stood at the window and smiled:

"Gerda, look at that officer! He looks like that movie star. ... I've forgotten his name. What a pleasant smile he has!"

Next day Irma spoke to one of the Americans. The latter answered with a smile:

"You've got a cute face, but I can't afford to pay sixty-five dollars. ..."

Irma burst into tears: he took me for a streetwalker. She recovered her composure somewhat in the evening when Günther came home and said that the Americans had been forbidden to fraternize with the inhabitants. Those who violated this order would be fined, he said.

"So that's why that American answered me like that!" said Irma. ... "But that's silly. I can understand them not wanting to talk to the Führer, but why not with me? They look very nice to me. I have always dreamed of going to Hollywood, or Miami. ..."

Several days later Johann's study was commandeered to provide quarters for young Lieutenant Harper. On the very first evening he gave Gerda a tin of meat and Irma a bar of chocolate. Gerda asked him:

"Is this accursed war going to end soon?"

"Yes, soon. Our tanks are chasing around just wherever they like. I don't even know where they are now. In Austria, perhaps. And the Russians are swell fighters. We are all right now, but it was lousy in the winter. As for Italy, it was real hell. I thought I would never get out of there alive. And I have a wife and a little child. ..."

Gerda was moved to tears. She wiped her eyes and said:

"Men are mad. ... What do they want to fight for?"

"You started it; I mean the Germans. ... At least, that's what our newspapers wrote. ... Do you think I know why we are fighting? They say you were a menace to America. I wouldn't have proclaimed war, had they asked me. ... I have an apartment in Chicago, much nicer than this one. But it's cosy here, it will be a rest after the mud of France. I must say, we like the Germans. Our officers say: 'We've got to a civilized

country at last.' As for our men, it makes no difference to them. They are fine lads, good fighters, but they don't give a damn for international politics, they want to go home...."

Harper lolled in an armchair and looked admiringly at Irma. That night she was compensated for the unpleasantness she had endured a few days before. Next morning she decided to furbish up the learning she had received at school; she wrote out English words in an exercise book and worked hard to memorize them.

Günther was allowed to remain at his job. True, he was told that all the Nazis would be sifted later, but he looked at the cheerful face of the American who told him that and felt reassured.

Two days later Frenzel came and began to mumble:

"The torch of America is the light of Goethe. Washington and Eisenhower expressed all that the best minds of Germany dreamed of...."

Gerda angrily interrupted him:

"What are you going to do now? I suppose your 'Strength Through Joy' has been shut up!..."

"I am organizing a League of Christian and Democratic Revival. The Americans have promised us every assistance."

Little Gretchen came in beaming: The American had given her some nice candies. Rudi was the only one who refused to surrender. He said: "When I'm big, we'll give them a licking."

That night Gerda asked her husband:

"Are you very unhappy, Günther?"

"Like everybody else.... It's a disaster, of course. But I was right—we ourselves have been lucky. We must not despair. It will be hard for about five years. Hitler has turned out to be a charlatan; his calculations were all wrong. We must adapt ourselves to circumstances. Who knows, perhaps, in twenty years' time Rudi will see Germany crushing them...."

Gerda burst into tears and said:

"Do you want him to be killed as Johann was? You are all mad! ..."

Günther fell asleep and snored contentedly. Indistinct whispers came through the wall from the next room—Irma was supplementing her knowledge of English. Americans were bawling under the window. Gerda lay in bed and pondered over recent events. As far as I am concerned, the war is over, and I can sum up the results. I was the wife of a university lecturer and Professor Borhardt received us as his guests. In Paris we visited a famous scientist. Johann was naive, but he could think, and wrote books. But Günther is a nonentity. The Americans are letting him hold his job today, but they may kick him out tomorrow. Marks are valueless now, we are beggars, I'll have to get some sewing to do, or go into an office. The town is ruined, and so is the whole country, for that matter.... How good everything was when Johann

came home from France! Everybody respected us. Now we are like pariahs. Isn't it awful that Irma is at this moment sleeping with that American? Her Willi is at the front, he is still fighting, if he has not been killed. And I am a nice one too, I smile at the American, take presents from him. . . . Johann is better off than I am, he does not see this. What did Frenzel say? "Skull." . . . It's terrible! Perhaps the snow has thawed in Russia now and a skull is lying in the middle of a field. Johann's teeth, eye sockets, all that is left—of him, of our happiness, of Germany. . . .

* 26 *

Vasya learned of his brother's death in the winter and could not recover from the shock for a long time. In his childhood he was jealous of his mother's preference for Seryozha; he never confided his secret thoughts to his elder brother for fear he would think they were foolish. Later they became chums, but there was always a distance between them. Vasya had loved Sergei as one might love a very beautiful and inapproachable woman. He would say to himself: "Sergei knows," or "Sergei would know what to do." He said this without envy, with admiration—he was proud of his brother. He could not resign himself to the thought that Sergei had been killed. I could have been killed, as Avanesyan, Nesterov and Grisha were, but not Sergei. . . .

Nina Georgiyevna wrote such a calm and restrained letter that on reading it Vasya nearly burst into tears. He knew how his mother felt—she had lived for Sergei. Nina Georgiyevna wrote: "I enclose a clipping from the newspaper. General Bel'sky wrote and told me how Seryozha was killed, he wrote very simply, humanly. He, too, has lost his son; he was killed in nineteen forty-three. Later I received a letter from two women in Yugoslavia. They wrote that Seryozha had saved their town. I am thinking about this all the time, and this is what is sustaining me. It is terrible to think that he is dead, but I can say that he died in a way that was worthy of himself—exactly in the way that he should have died. Valya is with me, we take care of each other, her being here makes it easier for me. I need not tell you how crushed with grief she is, it is hard for a young woman to go through a thing like that, and she was devoted to Seryozha from the very bottom of her heart. It is a good thing she has her art, the stage, her own individual life, it will be easier for her to recover. Vasenka, write to me often, I will not conceal from you that I get anxious when I don't hear from you for a long time. To comfort me. Natasha says that you are not fond of writing, but I confess that Seryozha's death has unnerved me somewhat. I wish you luck, and hope it will all end soon, it won't be long now." . . .

"Sergei is dead," said Vasya to himself with a feeling of pain and a sort of surprise. "The best are being killed. . . . It is hard for mother.

We must end this as quickly as possible: the entire nation is worn out, and I can't say who are worn out more—we, or those at home. . . .”

He soon made friends with his new comrades, the artillerymen; he realized that it was not by chance that the artillery had an attraction for him. Colonel Nikitin was regarded as a coldhearted man, lacking in human sympathy. But Vasya spent an evening with him. They discussed the mistakes that everyone makes in his life, they talked about friends, and of loneliness. Vasya realized that Nikitin was a passionate man, but his passion was concealed, he tested every corner of his heart with the aid of reason. This is what Vasya liked about the artillerymen—the combination of frantic passion and cool calculation, with mathematics, with the habit of not trusting guesses, assumptions, promptings of the heart. I think I am like that myself. . . . But perhaps not—I'm conceited. All right, when the war ends I'll ask Natasha—as an onlooker, she'll know best. . . .

When will it start? (In one's heart it sounded differently: when will it all end?)

Perhaps they had not been stationed in this little town very long, but to Vasya it seemed an interminably long time. He even thought to himself: I can tell by the Fritzes that we have been here for an eternity, I need not look at the calendar. . . . Every day in the street he met a fat German in a green felt hat. On the first days that German was so afraid of the Russians that Vasya said to Lieutenant Shebuyev: “You can draw his silhouette only if your hand is trembling, his outline is so indistinct—he's shivering.” But now this German looked confident, his outline was distinct, and he greeted Vasya like an old acquaintance. How long can one hang about here and stare at the signpost: “To Berlin—64 km.”?

Natasha was constantly with Vasya—not a shadow, as was the case in the forests of Byelorussia, but alive and warm; he saw her blowing to cool her tea, pouting her lips in a most amusing way, he saw her drawing stamens of flowers with her head cocked to the side, he saw her walking down Gorky Street wearing a little blue beret, with laughing eyes, and her inquisitive nose tipped up. When would he be able to take her in his arms? He had been waiting patiently for nearly four years, but now his patience was at an end. He caught himself making a mechanical gesture—every now and again he would look at his watch as if afraid of being late.

At last it started. . . . Vasya read the order. When he got to the words: “With Stalin's name on our lips, forward to Berlin,” his voice broke, he paused for an instant and concluded almost in a whisper: “Death to the German invaders!” He had uttered the words “to Berlin” lots of times before, but then they were only a slogan, a dream, a vow; now they were an order: to Berlin, yes, to Berlin. . . . How long had he waited for this hour, had talked about it to Ivan when the S.S. were chasing them! Ivan was hanged; he did not live to see this. . . .

The heart has its own chronology, and in that last hour of the night (Vasya glanced at his watch—it was four-thirty a.m.), when the ground heaved and the sky burst into flame, Vasya saw a vision of a bright, windy, summer's day, Minsk, of Natasha walking at his side, of a dead child lying on the ground like a broken doll, and of a woman choked by tears crying: "Pe-e-e-tya! . . ."

"It has started"—this was said so loudly that far away from Küstrin, in her apartment in Berlin, Hilde woke up, rubbed her eyes and screamed at Walter: "God, another air raid! . . ." Later Richter told her: "We were in Karlshorst. In my sleep I thought it was a thunderstorm. We all lost our heads. Lieutenant Schemmer said: 'The Russians have some kind of a secret weapon.' . . ."

Colonel Nikitin, recalling the first summer of the war, said: "The Germans were very strong, but even at that time they had no definite plan of operation. There was precision in the execution of minor orders. Their plan was: capture Moscow and march through the Red Square. But they had no definite plan of advance. They merely improvised: if it works, all right; if not, turn to the left, or the right. They were playing *chemin de fer*; they had nines in their hand, but their heads were not in the game. Now we are advancing, and it's like the moves on a chess-board—nothing left to chance, no hazards. Let them translate 'avos'* into German. We will capture Berlin and present them with the celebrated 'avos' as being of no use to us."

Long and methodical preparations had been made for this attack. Every night divisions, artillery, tanks and ammunition were sent across to the western bank of the Oder. The sappers, among whom were many of those who had been with Sergei at Stalingrad, quickly repaired the bridges which had been damaged by bombs and shells. Every evening Osip sent out scouts to procure a "tongue"; on his map he marked the positions of the German regiments, battalions, and companies. He would say ironically: "The Third is a company only in name—seventeen men, and all 'totals.' . . . On setting eyes on the Plan of Berlin on which the points of resistance, the government buildings which had been converted into fortresses, and the barricades were indicated, Minayev went into raptures: "We've outfritzed the Fritzes, what do you think of that? . . ."

General Hellwitz, who had replaced Colonel Gabler last year, declared to the officers and men of his division: "The Führer is convinced that Berlin is impregnable. We have concentrated here very strong forces and a considerable quantity of technical material. Having our faustpatrons, we need not be afraid of the Russian tanks. Our High Command will use the 'V's' against the Reds. If the Bolsheviks were able to hold Stalingrad for months when they had a river behind them, we shall easily be able to hold Berlin, Germany's centre of communications. All

* Perhaps. Leave it to chance.—*Tr.*

the objective factors for victory are in our favour. I demand selfless devotion from all of you." Sergeant Engel said to Richter: "Lieutenant Schemmer also says that we have a large force here—two hundred thousand." Richter stared hard at him and said: "Do you think we will hold Berlin?" Engel grinned and said: "I think they want to hold Berlin. The Lieutenant told me in confidence that if we hold the city until July, or even June, there will be a separate peace. Only he did not know with whom—with the Russians or the Anglo-Saxons. But how do you expect us to hold Berlin? If it were the beginning of the war it would be different. . . . It was tactless of the General to mention Stalingrad. . . . Take me, for example—am I a sergeant? At best, I am now an eighth of a sergeant."

Later it was said that twenty-two thousand guns had been used to pierce the enemy's defences. But at the time, Vasya could not be bothered with figures; he only kept shouting: "Fire!" although he realized that nobody heard him—so terrific was the din.

The night was rent by powerful searchlights; they dazzled the Germans, and they made everybody more cheerful—it looked as though it was easy to proceed along this brightly illuminated road. But it was not easy, not by a long chalk: the Germans had strongly fortified the whole district; it was evident that they had foreseen the possibility of fighting outside of Berlin long before the disaster.

"Fire!" shouted Vasya.

The Germans were firing at the battery at point-blank range. Zhbanov was killed. Stretcher-bearers carried away Grechko and Lunts. Spare parts were replaced; shells were brought up. Large, dark beads of perspiration on the men's faces. The men cannot hear, cannot see, cannot remember, but they distinctly hear their officer's commands and see the enemy's fire points. And they remember everything. Even in this inferno Chernov knows that his wife and Genka are waiting for him, he is not thinking of them, he is not thinking of anything just now—he is hard, stern, hot, like the barrel of his gun, but his wife and Genka are with him, he knows that they are near—over there, beyond Berlin. . . . Each man has his memory, his longing, his goal: Leningrad's year of starvation, Masha standing at the wicket-gate, the infant sucking its mutilated mother's finger at the Kharkov Tractor Plant. The hundred days in Stalingrad, the thousand days in inferno, the interrupted thesis on oil filters, Vanyusha, who was born after his father was called up, women, towns, rivers, their motherland. Vasya is shouting "Fire!" and before him, amidst the smoke and flames, in the grey-pink glare (as if blood had been mixed with the fog), stood darling, snub-nosed Natasha. . . .

"After all, I was foolish to come to Berlin," said Hilde to herself. "Kurt was right when he called me an 'alley cat.' I came in February. . . . Why? Not, of course, because I had quarrelled with Johanna. What did I care about her? I came because Walter is here. How could I have

fallen in love with a man like that? He is just a log of wood! I came here because of him, there are air raids nearly every night, and yet he refuses to comfort me!" She snuggled up against Walter. He growled: "It's early yet.... I want to sleep."...

At eight o'clock Walter went off to his office. Hilde was standing near the gate. Women were discussing what it was they had heard the night before. Frau Müller (her husband was in the A.A.D.) said: "It was our artillery on the Oder. The Russians tried to break through, but Hans says they will never succeed." Paul Wick, the landlady's fifteen-year-old son, came up to Hilde; his ears stuck out, and he had dark rings under his eyes. This was on the dimly lit staircase. Paul said: "I am going to the front, Hilde. Won't you kiss me?" In an absent-minded way she kissed him on the cheek. He pushed her head back and kissed her lips and said: "Hell, am I a soldier now, or not?..." When he had gone, the thought flashed through Hilde's mind: "If they are sending milkops like that to the front, things must be bad indeed..." She bought a copy of the *Morgenpost*; she never read newspapers as a rule and therefore searched a long time for the most important news. There was nothing in the paper about the Russian offensive. There was a report to the effect that the Germans were successfully counter-attacking in the region of the Elbe. Hilde saw an article entitled "Red Atrocities"; she could not read it to the end—it was too frightful.... Kurt had told her that the Russians were Asiatics, that they kept their cows in their houses at night, and didn't have decent lavatories. Our men illtreated the inhabitants, Kurt said they hanged women. They embittered the Russians, and now the Russians are here....

Hilde said to herself: I am not a coward, I've got used to the air raids. Everything is in its place—the ruins, the undamaged houses with flowers on the balconies, the shops and trams. Posters on the walls: "Victory, or Bolshevik Chaos." But why am I so frightened?... She decided to go and buy a box of face powder. The owner of the perfumery store carefully wrapped up the box, counted out the change and burst into tears: "I wanted to go to Magdeburg, but the car broke down."... Hilde thought to herself: perhaps I ought to go back to Johanna?

Refugees were standing or lying about at the railway station—it was difficult to get through. Somebody howled: "My suitcase is stolen!..." A woman in tears was saying: "We barely managed to get out of Stettin, the Russians are already there."... A railway man looked at Hilde in surprise and said: "Haven't you got a head on you? How do you expect to get there? The Americans are there..."

Hilde went back home. One of the urchins of the Volkssturm was carefully chalking on the wall of her house the inscription: "Berlin will remain German." Walter came home. Hilde embraced him and said: "Lord, what's going on? I was so anxious about you."... He said: "Give me something to eat. I am not in the mood for caresses now." Hilde

retorted indignantly: "I am a respectable woman, I have a husband, how dare you talk to me like that? I am risking my life for you. I could have been with Johanna now, the Americans are there. . . . You brute!" She made an omelette from egg powder and tears dropped into the frying pan.

With difficulty, Major Minayev's regiment pushed towards the eastern suburbs of Berlin. The German fortifications were splendidly equipped. The resistance resembled the fever during an attack of malaria: it rose, fell, and rose again. At one moment the Germans resisted desperately, clung to the small, suburban cottages, and launched counter-attacks, at another they were swept westwards like autumn leaves caught up in a gust of wind. Minayev fumed: You can't tell what they will do in an hour from now. . . . A low hill gave an exceptional amount of trouble. It seemed to Minayev that he had gone through all this before—the burning house on the right, the dead body of a young sapper caught in a web of barbed wire, and the dense, suffocating smoke. Just as it had been in the Don steppe, or later on at Chernobyl, Shibanov asked for a "few extra men" and General Luchitsky yelled into the telephone receiver: "What are you hanging back for?", and in the same way the Germans opened machine-gun fire when everybody thought that they had been wiped out, and at the crucial moment Kozhevnikov's battery was silenced. They counted the kilometres, but here three were equal to a hundred. . . . The battle lasted all night, and at the break of day Minayev, from the summit of the hill, looked into the grey, mournful distance: the mist, mingled with smoke, refused to yield to the sun.

General Luchitsky had had no sleep for forty-eight hours. He lay down on a couch much too short for him and drew in his long legs. Now Kashkin has gone forward. A good thing the tanks have gone into action; the Fritzes haven't mined everything, not by any means, and the sappers are fine lads. . . . Perhaps I can get an hour's sleep. But sleep would not come. So here's Berlin. . . . He did not think that, but it was in him, like the whole of his past life, like Moscow, like Zhenya's kind eyes with the fine wrinkles round them. Eight years before this, Luchitsky (then a humble battalion commander) had been walking through the sultry streets of Madrid. He had gone to Spain as a volunteer and had said to himself: I'm lucky, everybody was keen to go. . . . He knew that the fascists were the "enemies of progress"; he knew that from books and newspapers. In the narrow, filthy back street in the Cuatro Caminos, children were playing. What a lot of children there are in Spain, he thought to himself (this was on the day after his arrival). Suddenly he heard a crash, and he saw a thin stream of blood running down the side of the road. Since then he had been through a great deal, but he had not forgotten that sultry day. On the twenty-second of June he was in Brest. A woman in torn clothes and with a baby in her arms was screaming "Save me!" He put her in his car. The child was dead. He

retreated from Oskol to Voronezh. In Voronezh his eldest son, a first-year student, was killed. His subordinates said of him: "He is a good commander, but a dry old stick." But he had a wound in his heart that would not heal. Now he closed his eyes and smiled: Berlin! . . .

Minayev was daydreaming: since childhood he had been fond of lilac. All flowers were nice, but there was something special about lilac. Perhaps because it bloomed in the spring and was associated with the dreams a man dreams when the quiet, measured life of the long, northern winter gives way to the rumbling and whistling of railway engines, girlish laughter and the desire to love somebody, or to go on a long journey, in short, to do something out of the ordinary. . . . "Here is a five," Minayev said to Olya. Olya smiled, swallowed the tiny petals and said: "You needn't worry, we'll have luck even without this. . . . We've finished with Müncheberg, and now it's 'nach Berlin,' as the refined Fritzes say."

They dined in a dinky little villa, ate canned food from Dresden china and drank water from crystal wineglasses. Assistant Political Instructor Tereshkovich said: "I wonder whose house this is? Must be some banker's. And now Pyotr Tereshkovich, son of a hereditary Yaroslavl carpenter, is dining here." . . . Then he thought for a while and said to Minayev: "How is it you have never been in Yaroslavl? It's a most beautiful city. . . . The boulevard overlooking the Volga is alone worth going to see. You live in Moscow, right next door, you might say, and never went to have a look! It is much more beautiful than. . . ." he paused to think and then asked: "What is it, Münchhausen? . . . All right, let it be Müncheberg. . . . You will meet Tanya, a scientific worker—Marxism-Leninism, and a wonderful person in general. Mayechka is four. I haven't seen her since the beginning of the war. She was born in May—a month before. . . . Already at that time Tanya said she could smile, but to tell the truth, she was only blowing bubbles. . . . You must come. . . . Why, it's silly, you've travelled over half of Europe and yet you haven't been in Yaroslavl! This music will end soon. . . ." Olga jumped up: "The General wants to talk to you!" Luchitsky said: "The tanks have gone forward. You can make a move now. The Berliners are waiting impatiently for you." . . . Minayev could picture the stern general smiling into the telephone receiver. He answered: "Your orders will be obeyed, Comrade General. As for those Berliners, let them wait a day or two, we waited four years." . . .

A shell burst near the house where Hilde lived. The kitchen windows rattled. Hilde went into hysterics. She had not been frightened by air raids, the neighbours and Walter used to wonder at her coolness. She knew what to expect when she returned to Berlin. . . . But now her nerves gave way. She looked out of the window, it was quite dark and it seemed to her that Russian tanks were clattering in the darkness. Now the Bolsheviks would force their way into the house. It will be good if

they throw a grenade and have done with it, otherwise they may begin to torture us. . . . She gulped down a glass of water, bit her lower lip and looked at herself in the mirror. Walter is a fool. Of course I look bad. It's not surprising after nights like these, but still I am good-looking. . . . She recalled how that boy Paul Wick had come running to her one afternoon and, gasping for breath, had said: "They've given me a faustpatron, it's rather heavy, but I can hold it. I won't let a single tank pass. Kiss me, Hilde, like you kiss a man." She had kissed him and he staggered out.

Next day Hilde was forced to carry sandbags. She was indignant: this is not a job for a young woman, it will tear my insides. . . . Somebody sang a soldier's song:

*Crimson dawn, too early hast thou broken,
A gaping wound sears my breast. . . .*

Hilde thought: suppose Kurt has been killed! It can't be! I love him very much, more than all the rest, he was my first love, that means my real love, the years I was faithful to him. . . . I must help him, if these sandbags can save him, then I am willing to have a rupture. She recalled her school reader: our Rhine, Germany, the old oaks, Friedrich's grenadiers. . . . Next to her an elderly man with a close-cropped moustache and bluish veins on his cheek was working. He kept on grumbling: "I have sciatica. I am sixty-two. I can't lift heavy weights. Let those whippersnappers clear up their own mess." . . . A shell burst on the corner of Budapesterstrasse and Königgrätzerstrasse. Hilde fell to the pavement and spread out her arms as if she were swimming. When she picked herself up the man with sciatica wiped his pants and then his face with his handkerchief and said: "So this is what we have come to! I ask you, young woman, what's the use of these barricades? If they haven't stopped the Russians on the Oder, why do they think they will stop them in this street? And who is going to stop them? The snotty noses from the Volkssturm? Or I? Let Goebbels lug sandbags, he deserves a job like that." . . . Hilde thought: everybody's tongues have started wagging. He is right, of course, Walter refuses to understand, he is stupid, and besides, he serves in the Polizeiamt and is afraid to think. I told Kurt as far back as nineteen forty that this will end badly. What was the use of capturing Paris when even I was aware that we would have to give it up again? And how many people have perished. Well, I can understand them going after Paris, it was an attractive bait, I always dreamed of going there. But why did they have to barge into Russia? Even before the war Kurt said it was a horrible country—forests and Bolsheviks. What good did they find there? Slept in the same room with the cow. . . . Now the Russians have come here, I will be killed and I don't know what for. . . . Somebody can still take a fancy to me. And

then, Kurt may come home. . . . To die because of these lunatics! Before the war Kurt assured me that everything would turn out all right, that there was nothing to be afraid of because we were—the storm. Piffle! I am not the storm, I am an ordinary woman, I want peace. . . . She lugged sandbags and tears trickled from her eyes.

Walter did not come home; she waited for him all night, but in vain. Next morning she went to the Polizeiamt. She was told that Walter was guarding the Silesia Railway Station; they warned her not to attempt to go there because there was shooting there. Nevertheless, she got there; several times she was obliged to crawl along the pavement. She said to Walter: "I have brought you some sandwiches and some chocolate that I didn't manage to send to Kurt, and some eau de Cologne. Why are you here? It is madness. . . ." She got up on tiptoes and, shaking her golden curls, she kissed him. He swore at her: "Bitch! Do you realize what's happening? . . ." He pulled himself together: "It's my nerves. . . . Get out of here quick. . . ." When she had gone he swore again: "It's for whores like her that we have to die! . . . Twice already Russian tanks had appeared in Frankfurter Allee. They had fired at them with anti-aircraft guns. Walter thought: I wish they'd kill me, or let me go, anything to put an end to this, I can't stand any more of it. . . .

Among the crew of the leading tank that was advancing from Lichtenberg to the Silesia Railway Station was Junior Lieutenant Misha Zolotorenko who had unwittingly told Valya the frightful truth about her father. For a long time after he had reproached himself: whatever made me tell her that? . . . Although, in the old days, Zina, and the other girl members of the Pickwick Club too for that matter, had thought him rough, he had a tender and responsive heart. He seemed rough because he was shy; he wanted to hide his broad hands that looked like paddles, so he waved them about; too shy to speak about himself, he loudly and hurriedly talked about the last football match, or about a new design in automobiles. Zina had once rejected him, but he had not forgotten her. When he heard of her death he felt as if the brightest and most vital thing had gone out of his life, and yet he had not seen her for two years before the war. Just now he carried in his tunic a photograph of Zina and the newspaper clipping he had shown Valya. He thought to himself: Well, Zina has arrived in Berlin too. . . . He gazed at the drab, monotonous houses without curiosity. Everything here disgusted him, every thing except one—we have got here! . . . This was his fifth tank. . . . He had been wounded twice—in the Kuban and near Kharkov. . . . It was very hot inside the tank. Zolotorenko glanced at Kruglikov: he looked as if he had just come from under a shower. . . . He felt a severe jolt, he wanted to shout, but didn't. Later they removed Misha Zolotorenko's dead body from the tank. His comrades stood silent and frowning, nobody said a word, all were thinking the same thing: five minutes before the end. . . .

But the tanks kept advancing. There was a barricade in front of them: a yellow tramcar bearing the figure 69, and some overturned motor trucks. Behind the barricade lay Walter. When the tanks got quite near he suddenly abandoned his faustpatron and crept to the pavement. He thought: how wide the street is, I'll never cross it. . . . He did cross it, crept through a gateway and rushed to the top floor of the house. His heart throbbed frightfully: from the stairs, and from fear. Am I really alive? . . . He tore the Volkssturm brassard from his arm. I've been fooling around enough! Let the Führer play this game. I am an ordinary human being, I want to live.

Some S.S. men had fortified themselves in a block of working-class houses near the Silesia Railway Station. Vasya ordered his battery to open fire on the houses. An old man crept up to the Russian lines and in a mixture of German and Polish said: "For God's sake! . . . There are women and children in those houses. . . ." Vasya gave the order to cease fire and said: "We'll give the civilians ten minutes in which to clear out." . . . People came pouring out of the houses carrying children, bundles and suitcases. "The devils!" growled Junior Lieutenant Gorbatenkov—he was sorry for the children. But the S.S. men continued to sweep the square and two streets with machine-gun fire; now they were shooting the people who were hurrying out of the houses. Then Vasya gave the order again: "Fire!"

General Luchitsky said to Minayev: "Last night the radio announced that Berlin is surrounded. Only the centre remains to be captured." . . . He thought for a moment and then said: "We conducted the operation well. As for the plan. . . . There is no need to talk about that—we see the same hand that operated at Stalingrad." . . .

Krylov was at the Rummelsburg Railway Station. Crowds made a dash for the freight trains. The most enterprising hacked at the walls of the cars with axes, tore them down, and dragged out cases of canned food, sugar and tobacco, and sacks of peas; children poured granulated sugar into aprons and honey into their caps. Dmitri Alexeyevich said to nurse Shevelyova: "Look at those axemen! They've gone mad. They have forgotten they are in their own Berlin. And yet they claim to be an honest people and say that they became marauders only when they got to our country! Look! They are trampling on a child!" He ran among the crowd shouting: "Stop, or I'll shoot! . . . Scoundrels! You have no pity for your own children!" . . . He picked up a little girl of about seven or eight: "Take her to our base. . . . Her arm is broken." . . .

General Hellwitz was in the basement of a five-storey house. His adjutant reported: "The Russians are in the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Strasse." The General made no reply. He, the Divisional Commander, had fought as long as it was possible to fight. But this was not war, it was lunacy. I don't know what they are thinking at Headquarters. Perhaps it is not Keitel who is in command, but some ignoramus like Goebbels, or the

Führer himself? That lunatic is the cause of the doom of the finest army in the world. . . . General Hellwitz recalled his predecessor, Colonel Gabler. He had known him in his young days: they had studied at the military academy together. The Nazis shot Colonel Gabler. General Hellwitz said at the time: "I am sorry for him. He was a good commander, but he deserved his punishment—we have no right to interfere in politics." Recalling those words now the General smiled grimly: The Nazis did nothing else but interfere in military operations. The conspirators were right. It's a pity Schauffenberg missed. . . . In the summer of nineteen forty-four we could still have bargained for a draw, but now we have been brought to our knees. The Allies would certainly have reached an agreement with men like Colonel-General Beck, or von Schulenburg. . . . The adjutant said: "Herr General, Major Ramm is enquiring when he will receive ammunition, his supplies are running out, he is holding squares forty-one and forty-two." General Hellwitz thought to himself: that Major Ramm will very soon receive one bullet—in his chest or in his backside—it depends upon his temperament. . . . Angrily he said to the adjutant: "Better give me a glass of water and my medicine—you'll find it in my greatcoat pocket."

Richter reflected: I think it's the twenty-ninth today, already a week. . . . It's no more than two kilometres from here to my house. I have been near Moscow. . . . A triumphant return, indeed! Lieutenant Schemmer is calling upon us to defend the "heart of Berlin." But who is in the heart? The Führer, perhaps? But why must I defend him? He has wrecked my life. He has wrecked Berlin. Even if we have a new government it will take more than twenty years to rebuild the city. Some idiots have chalked on the walls: "Berlin will remain German." But there is no Berlin—neither German, nor Russian, nor Peruvian. . . . Richter went up to Lieutenant Schemmer and said: "So we've got to die under these ruins, is that it?" Schemmer shrugged his shoulders: "I have asked Major Ramm, but he can't get in touch with General Hellwitz." This did not satisfy Richter: "So we. . . ." The Lieutenant interrupted him: "The order remains in force until it is rescinded." They were in the large Dresden Bank building. The Russians were bombarding the building with four guns. One corner of it had already been shot away. Sergeant Engel said: "We are defending Lebensraum, I am surprised you are not shouting Sieg Heil." . . . Five minutes later Engel was saying nothing; he was lying with his mouth open surrounded by bank ledgers. Richter realized that he had to get out of this. He went down by the fire escape. If the Russians are in our street, I am done for. . . . He lay in the gateway of an empty house until nightfall. When the guns ceased firing for a moment he thought he heard voices speaking Russian. At last he crept out and ran, keeping close to the walls of the houses. Nobody stopped him.

When Hilde set eyes on her husband she could not even scream, she had no strength to embrace him. She wept, and neither then nor later could she tell whether it was from grief or joy. At last she exclaimed: "You are alive? . . ." He shouted: "Stop talking nonsense! Get me a suit of clothes at once, I must change." . . . She couldn't understand: "But why?" He retorted angrily: "If you want to perish you can do so. I'll give you the address—the Tiergarten. You'll get a toy gun there, and the Führer's blessing. But I've had enough of it. What are you standing there for? Get my clothes, quick! . . ." Hilde threw everything out of the chest: chemises, her evening shoes, dresses, at last she found an old coat of Kurt's and a pair of wide, short trousers. She said: "You can't wear these." . . . But he was already pulling the trousers on: "Anything can be worn now," he said. Hilde nestled up to him and looked at him with her round cat's eyes: "Oh, Kurt, is it you? How happy I am! . . . But something terrible is happening. . . . Will the Russians really be here soon?" He nodded and turned away. Hilde at once picked up a white silk chemise that was lying on the floor and, opening the window, she hung the chemise out as a flag. She saw white rags hanging from the windows of all the houses. Kurt looked round the room littered with junk from the wardrobe and chest and remarked with a grin: "One would think that they have already been in our apartment." . . .

In the Tiergarten there was a group of Volkssturm, among them was Paul Wick, who had taken a fancy to green-eyed Hilde. He was now thinking of her and of the Führer. Ever since he was a child he had heard nothing else but: we must die for the Führer. Now lots of Germans were deserting the Führer, were swearing and surrendering to the Russians. But Paul was not like that, he was fifteen, but he was a real German soldier. When he had saved Berlin, he would go to Hilde, and she would be unable to resist him. She is Isolda, he thought, and I am Tristan. . . . Instead of a faustpatron, of which he had dreamed, he held an ordinary rifle. Dusk set in. Suddenly Paul noticed that only three of them were left, all the others had fled. A student from the Hitlerjugend kept shouting: "Now boys, give 'em hell!" An elderly man said: "I don't give a damn for snotty noses like you. But I can't stand Poles and Russians. I'd rather die than surrender to those Asiatics." Paul fired into the darkness. The elderly man said: "Save your ammunition." But Paul couldn't stop firing. And the little student yelled: "That's right! Give 'em hell!" Now and again a mortar shell burst and shattered the trees. The elderly man dropped to the ground and groaned monotonously for a long time. Paul saw Hilde's eyes shining in the fog. The Führer raised his hand to the black and lurid sky. When day broke Paul saw Russians in the avenue. He fired and then clutched his abdomen and dropped to the ground.

Minayev's regiment was fighting in the very centre of the city: it was storming the Potsdamer-Platz. Germans had entrenched themselves in the Metro. They were forced out with hand grenades and captured faustpatrons. "This is the First of May," said Tereshkovich to Minayev. "Congratulations!"... On the outskirts of Berlin there were evidences of the festival: flags, portraits of Stalin, merry songs. But here the war was still on, frightful in its fury. When a few moments' lull set in Tereshkovich fell adreaming: How is Tanya celebrating the day? It must be jolly at home, they know that the last hours of the war have come—just the proper time, spring, May.... The C.P. was on the fifth floor. Tereshkovich saw that some of the men had halted in front of an artillery-battered barricade. He thought to himself: the men are tired, I must cheer them up. The men dashed forward. But Tereshkovich staggered and fell on his side. He was carried to the next house. Minayev came running in. There was a loud rattle in Tereshkovich's throat, he did not recognize anybody. Minayev looked at him silently for a while and then went away—his men were combing out the surrounding streets. It was not until the evening that his thoughts could turn to Tereshkovich. Minayev had lost many friends in the war. Death had long ceased to surprise him. But never had he felt such heartache as he did on this festive night of May. And so I shall not go to visit him in Yaroslavl.... No doubt his wife has already ironed his jacket—she expects him any day.... And this may be the last day.... Tereshkovich's death seemed unintelligible and therefore intolerable to him. Sergeant Korolyov came up and said: "What a splendid fellow he was! ... Went into every detail."... After a moment's pause he added: "I'm from Yaroslavl too."...

Krylov was kept busy. He treated the wounds of our men and of the Germans, and of civilians who had accidentally come under fire. He asked himself: "Why can't they fight for Berlin as we fought for Stalingrad? It's their city, their capital.... People will say: we are the stronger side now. That's true, of course. But in August nineteen forty-two the Germans were stronger than we were. A colonel said to me: 'We now have forty times more guns than they have.' That is no doubt true, but still it is not an explanation. They have forty times less heart, that's the crux of the matter! They don't know what they have been fighting for, and that's why they don't want to die now. How they shouted: 'Volk, Deutschum,' but they failed to unite the people. There were millions of philistines ruled by a million colts. While things were going well, it held together, but now it's all falling to pieces. They bow to us, inform against each other, ready to thank us for having licked them. It's silly."

Sergeant-Major Gusev, who was lying wounded, asked to see Krylov. He spoke with difficulty and Krylov stopped him several times: "You must not talk." But the Sergeant-Major begged to be heard: "I am dying. I can feel that.... In October nineteen forty-one I was serving in the

Hundred Thirty-Second Special Sappers' Battalion. It was disbanded later. There was a fellow with me there named Nikita Vasyutin. One day we went out together. He did something marvelous. Holding a mine, he crept under an enemy tank, the tank blew up. . . . I was wounded. Later I reported what Nikita did, but I was told the unit was disbanded and nothing could be done about it. . . . He had told me before that his old folks lived somewhere in the Vologda Region. . . . Now I am dying, and nobody will know about what Nikita did. I thought—when the war's over I'll write to Stalin. Let him comfort the old folks. . . . When those tanks turned up Nikita said: 'Let's roll a fag.' He rolled it and crept forward. . . ." The Sergeant-Major could say no more, perspiration broke out on his face, he fell unconscious. That night he died. Krylov was deeply moved: "I'll write to Stalin! . . . What men we have! He was dying, but he thought of his comrade—wanted to comfort the old folks. . . . And why did he die? . . ." Krylov went into the garden. The smell of medicines, corpses (some S.S. men had perished under the ruins of the next house), of white acacias and of fumes pervaded the air. "It smacks of war, and yet the war is ending," growled Krylov. . . .

Hilde gazed at the Russians in horror: they were marching past under her window. Later two men came in to enquire whether there were any arms in the place. She thought to herself: they are going to kill me. . . . But the Russians went away. She kept on thinking of what Kurt had told her and she imagined that any moment an Asiatic with slanting eyes would come and lead a cow into the bedroom. . . . She grew bolder on the third day, and accompanied by Frau Müller, she went into the street; they stood on the doorstep so as to be able to run back at the slightest sign of danger. A Russian officer stopped and enquired: "Where's the Tiergarten?" Hilde pointed to the right. The officer smiled. She too smiled. Her green eyes lit up at once. Kurt was lying in dejection, his face to the wall, but she tidied up the apartment and thought to herself: they are not going to bring any cows, it's all nonsense, they are even attractive, and you could even fall in love with one like that officer—he had grey eyes, like a stormy sky, and they flashed, he's full of vim, you can see that at once. . . .

Vasya's battery hammered away at a vast, gloomy building. The stone bodies of enormous Valkyries sprawled shamelessly on its facade. Later the Germans came filing out with their hands up. Vasya and Junior Lieutenant Gorbatenkov inspected the Reichstag building. The halls were littered with bricks, furniture and abandoned weapons. Our men had written their names on the battered walls. Gorbatenkov drew a small portrait of Stalin from his pocket and said: "Comrade Captain, I cut this out of *Ogonyok* in nineteen forty-two. It marched with me from Rossosh to Kalach and back again, right to Berlin. It was with me when

things were bad, and it was with me when things were good. I kept it all the time. And now that we have arrived, we can stick it on this wall." . . . And he suited the action to the word.

Minayev escorted a German general to Army Headquarters. "Be careful, there's a shell hole here," said Minayev. The General answered: "I can't hear what you say, your artillery has deafened me." At Headquarters Minayev was told: "We've sent for a typist. General Weidling is going to dictate the order to surrender." The German Colonel who accompanied Weidling dropped the monocle from his eye and immediately put it up again.

Later Minayev had a good wash, drank a glass of French wine and wrote to his mother: "Your Mitka is now sitting in the study of some wealthy German. The owner of this house collected toy soldiers—they worshipped war, there's no denying it; only now they are a little bit disillusioned. Around me there are thousands of tin soldiers of all times and all countries. There is one of our soldiers here too, standing modestly behind a row of different kinds of Uhlans. But for all that, he reached Berlin, and today I saw the Germans come to us cap in hand. You told me once that it was wrong to gloat over another's grief. That's true, if you mean human people. But what would you say about a German colonel who, when the terms of surrender were being signed, kept smoothing his hair and sticking his monocle in his eye? It is terrible to think that millions of good honest people have been killed because of tin soldiers like that. The day before yesterday we buried Captain Tereshkovich. I look at Berlin and all the time I am thinking of that little mound at Stalingrad that I wrote you about. It will be over very soon now, Mum dear. I am sorry I have not obeyed your order to catch Hitler alive. The Germans say he took poison. Olya sends her love and kisses. The German women here stare at her, evidently thinking that she is the terrible Bolshevik who, according to Goebbels, eats German babies as a snack with her vodka. After all, Mum, they are idiots, apart from everything else, they are downright idiots. . . ."

That night the long-awaited announcement rang through Moscow: "Our forces have taken complete possession of the capital of Germany, the City of Berlin—the centre of German imperialism and the hotbed of German aggression." Streams of rockets shot into the sky, and Maria Mikhailovna Minayeva stood at her window and wept. Later she went in to see Katzman and said: "You and I also got there, David Grigoryevich. . . . And your Grisha got there. . . . Isn't it a big thing?—We are victorious. . . ."

* 27 *

Somewhere fighting was still proceeding, but in Berlin it was quiet; and this quiet depressed Richter. He felt that someone would come at any moment and pack him off to Siberia.

Hilde came in puffing and said:

"They are requisitioning! A Russian officer! . . ."

Richter thought: This is the end. They'll take me now. He asked Hilde:

"What's he like?"

"I didn't see him. An orderly came. Tall, rather good looking. . . ."

"That's all you think about. . . ."

Hilde prepared the best room for the Russian officer, the room that had served as Richter's study before the war. Frau Müller came in and said:

"A Russian has moved into my flat, a senior lieutenant, a very nice man. Now I am safe from all sorts of visitors. . . ."

Richter thought: Perhaps this Russian officer will save me too, if he doesn't want to do me in, that is. . . .

He said to Hilde:

"Don't under any circumstances tell him I have been on the Eastern Front. Tell him I was in France, then in Berlin, and that I have been invalided out of the army."

On setting eyes on Vasya, Hilde thought: a wonderfully nice man; he's not a bit terrifying. I will never believe a man like that keeps a cow in his room, or drives stakes through girls. Why did Kurt tell stories like that? Goebbels told us enough lies. . . . She began to tend to Vasya's wants, spread her best sheets on his bed and gave him her eiderdown pillow. She asked him what he would like for breakfast. Vasya did not understand her. She turned to Richter and said:

"Speak to him in Russian."

"Are you crazy? If I do that he will know where I have been fighting. I suppose you want to get rid of me. . . ."

"Don't talk nonsense, Kurt. It will be far quieter for us if we make a good impression on this officer. . . . But what can I do if he does not understand me? Tell him you were in Russia long ago, before we were married, when the Germans were friendly with the Russians and you were able to learn Russian. That will make him more friendly towards us. . . ."

Kurt began to burrow among his old papers, sneezed, cursed, and at last found a photograph of himself taken with a group of Russian architects in Kuznetsk. When he knocked at Vasya's door his mind was a blank, just as if he were taking part in an attack. Pointing to Hilde, he said:

"My wife wants to know at what time you will want your breakfast?"

"Oh, you need not trouble, thank you. We have our own dining room."

Hilde left the room, but Richter remained, like a condemned criminal. I hope he starts questioning me soon, he thought! . . . But Vasya said nothing.

"I suppose you are wondering where I learnt Russian?"

Vasya smiled.

"Not in the least."

"Perhaps you think I have fought on the Eastern Front? I was in France—on garrison duty. I learnt Russian a long time ago. I was in Kuznetsk, thirteen years ago, I had my photograph taken with your architects."

He offered Vasya the photograph. Vasya took it out of politeness and forthwith returned it.

"So that accounts for the blueprints and books I see here. . . . You, are an architect, then?"

"Yes."

"So am I. . . ."

Both remained silent for quite a while. Vasya did not know what to say to this German. And Richter felt that he had not said to the Russian what was the most important. He enquired whether the books did not incommode the Herr Captain.

"I had some Marxian literature, but I was obliged to burn it when the Nazis came into power. All I have left are the books of my profession and classics. When I was in Kuznetsk, I stood very close to Communism. . . ."

"That's interesting," answered Vasya.

Richter realized that the Russian did not believe him. He bowed and left the room.

But Hilde came into the room every now and again, bringing an ashtray, seeing that the blackout blinds were properly drawn, and so forth. She looked at the Russian tenderly and roguishly, hoping he would understand her at a glance. Vasya was polite, but indifferent. What can it mean? He simply ignores me. . . . Have I grown so ugly? She spent a long time twisting and turning in front of her mirror, she painted her lips, put on a green frock that suited her particularly well and knocked at Vasya's door. He sat there as if she were not in the room. She ran to her own room and burst into tears. Kurt is right—they are horrible! . . . He did not even look at me. . . . She was sad all next day. It was not until late in the evening that Richter saw her merry and excited. She said to her husband:

"Do you know, that orderly is a very nice fellow. He speaks a little German. . . ."

Richter saw at once what was behind those words. He told her what he thought of her, but in a half-hearted way, only for decency's sake. He thought to himself in horror: I am even glad she has cottoned on to a Russian soldier. . . . What has happened to me? I can't even feel jealous. . . .

Several days later Vasya returned to his lodgings in a very cheerful mood. Richter almost collided with him in the hall. Vasya smiled to Richter. Richter's face beamed. The Captain is in a happy mood this evening. I must talk to him. . . . He peeped through a crack. Vasya was writing. Richter said to Hilde: "Don't make a noise. he's working."

Seeing that the Russian was standing at the open window, Richter knocked.

"You have forgotten about the blackout, Herr Captain."

Vasya tore himself away from the evening coolness; the day had already been hot, like summer.

"There's no more need for the blackout. Don't you understand? The war is over. Your generals signed the unconditional surrender today...."

Richter did not turn a hair. He continued to smile—respectfully and dejectedly. After a brief pause he said:

"I congratulate you, Herr Captain."

This disgusted Vasya: We licked them, and yet he congratulates me....

"Take a seat," he said. "Would you like to smoke? Well, it's over at last.... Now you'll be able to go on with your work.... To build.... There are plenty of ruins here...."

"Your towns have also suffered heavily. I have seen Smolensk, Minsk...." (Richter's face paled—he had betrayed himself.) "I saw them on the screen...."

Vasya smiled ironically:

"Where you saw them is unimportant. The important thing is that you have seen them. You know what your people have done."

"War is frightful. I am not one of the Hitlerjugend, I was brought up in a different spirit, I remember Remarque's novel, Piscator's productions and Thaelmann's speeches. We dreamed of peace. I knew Colonel Gabler very well, I built a villa for him. He was implicated in the plot, the Nazis shot him. Only recently I learned that the plotters had demanded peace a year ago.... I need not tell you, Herr Captain; when our troops were in the Caucasus I was not a bit glad, I knew it would end badly. War is chaos, nobody understands anything."

"You are wrong there. I was in a partisan unit for three years, your people called us 'bandits.' Nineteen forty-two. Your troops were in the Caucasus. We were in the forest. Your police regiment was chasing us.... Do you think I had any doubt? Not a bit. I knew perfectly well then that I would get to Berlin. I might have been killed, of course, but then somebody else would have got here and be sitting in this armchair...."

Richter again smiled respectfully, wished Vasya good night and went to his own room. I would never say that captain had been a bandit. He is so polite and well brought up. Why didn't I tell him I have fought in Russia? It is peacetime now. There is something degrading in my behaviour, I am an architect like he is, and yet I am so humble before him, didn't even sit down, although he invited me to take a seat.... What have I come to? He says I will build. Build what? And for whom? The people with taste have been ruined, or have fled. We'll have to eke

out an existence by patching up houses, patching up life. Uninteresting. . . .

Hilde came running in:

"Kurt, they've signed! . . . Frau Müller has only just told me. . . ."

She enthusiastically tore down the black paper blind. Richter answered:

"I know. The Russian told me. . . ."

"Why didn't you tell me? . . ."

"It's uninteresting."

"Have you gone mad, Kurt? What do you mean, uninteresting? The war's over, that's the most important thing. We have suffered for nearly six years. . . ."

"Well, you haven't suffered, you have had a ripping time. Our sufferings are only just beginning. . . ."

"I won't care if we don't have stockings, or sugar. I want peace and quiet. Once you told me that we were the storm. That was propaganda. Goebbels' stuff. . . . I don't want to be the storm, I want to be an ordinary woman. . . ."

She went to the kitchen which had become her favourite place. But Richter remained sitting; his face covered with his hand. Hilde is right—that was silly about the storm. . . . We were only playing the part of a storm, but when the storm broke we were unable to stand up against it. What's going to happen now? Instead of towns we have ruins. And I am a ruin too. When they begin to clear up they'll sweep me away. . . . Uninteresting. . . .

When Richter left the room Vasya returned to the window. What a rotter that German is! Slimy. . . . He rode the high horse in Russia. I suppose, but now he's sniveling. . . . Better not think about him—the evening is too fine. Vasya went to his dining room. He recalled the Nalibok forest, the language of the trees. Avanesyan's love, and Seryozha, who died in a distant land, foreign and yet his own. Vasya's heart was so full of mixed feelings—sadness, rapture and pride—that he could never express them in words; only his blue eyes, the eyes that Natasha often dreamed of, flashed in the dark, warm night.

In the dining room another unexpected joy awaited him. Colonel Nikitin said to him:

"You will fly to Moscow with me tomorrow."

Vasya smiled and at once forgot about those around him. He was already flying to Natasha.

* 28 *

Minayev and Olya were walking down an avenue in the park. The Persian lilac was swooning with excess of happiness. Minayev held Olya's hand. It would soon be two years that they were married,

but they were like lovers who had only just confessed their feelings towards each other. These two years had been turbulent and hard; words of love died before they could be uttered. Only a week before, Olya had been sitting in the basement of a half-wrecked house in Berlin and repeating: "I am magpie, put me on to Oka." Now, this was all over. . . .

"Now you are Olya. Yes, you are. Don't argue. You have been rose and rosette, moon, Poltava, lime tree, needle, Dvina and swallow. On that mound 'Rose' called 'Chamois,' but there were no roses there, only dry grass and mortar shells. You have been 'dawn' and you called Chegodayev, but he had been killed by a shell, and you said: 'Chegodayev reports that everything is O.K. at his end. . . . I mean, Chegodayev has been killed, Captain Babushkin is reporting.' In the Potsdamer-Platz you were 'magpie,' and Tereshkovich laughed and said: 'She does chatter like a magpie, doesn't she?' That was an hour before he ran into the street. I was told that yesterday Keitel didn't know where to put his baton while he was signing, and that an American cameraman yearned to swap that baton for cigarettes. It's all up with the Fritzes now, Olya. Do you know what this means? That you are no longer a magpie, or the Dvina. If I do call you swallow now, it's not over the telephone, I whisper it in your ear, so that nobody will hear. The war is over, and you are no longer a rosette, but Olya, my Olya! . . ."

He was enchanted by the sound of her name, as if he were pronouncing it for the first time.

Olya said:

"When I first met you, I was scared. This was on the fifth of August, near Kletskeya. Communication was cut, but you wanted me to call up the Colonel. You must have been very angry, because you said to me: 'Don't you know how to use the telephone? Perhaps you think it's a washing machine?' Why did you say 'washing machine,' and smile when you said it? Had you sworn at me, I would not have minded, I already knew that everybody swore at the front. But when you said 'washing machine' I nearly burst out crying."

"Already at that time I thought—she's a nice girl. . . ."

"But why did the nice girl make you think of a washing machine? . . . Do you know, Mitya. I already knew then that I had a soft spot in my heart for you. . . . Do you remember when we were attacking, at the end of February, during the unsuccessful offensive at Orel? You came in frozen and drank hot water. I wanted to do something for you, but you said 'Go easy, my wife is jealous.'"

"That was because I very much wanted to hold your hand. . . . Did you believe what I said?"

"I believed that you wanted to tease me. Several times before that you had told me that you were not married."

"I didn't dare to tell you. It was not until we got to Chernigov. . . ."

"But why there?"

"The river there, and the chestnut trees.... Look what lovely lilac!..."

"They are going off already.... Do you remember when we were near Duminichi, before we got to Orel? I picked a bunch and brought it to you."

"There was heavy bombing there. Babajan was wounded.... There are hardly any left of those who were on the mound. I am sorry Osip is not with us here."

"Where is he?"

"They went further south, to Potsdam. You know, he is a good fellow, Olya, but he can't express his feelings. It's the same with me. But who is different? Poets, perhaps; but they, probably, have no feelings. When I want to express my feelings and can't, I play the fool, but Osip growls...."

"When we were on the mound, Mitya, did you believe you would pull through?"

"I didn't, but it seemed to me that I must. I think everybody felt the same: others are being killed, but I will survive.... Not long ago Tereshkovich invited us to Yaroslavl, do you remember?..."

"Yes—Tanya and Mayechka...."

"Zarubin was on the mound. Do you remember, we called him 'Mister'? He spoke so slowly that you could fall asleep after each word. He was killed during the counter-attack; he ran ahead of all the rest. Magaradze danced well.... Brodsky told us about his work at the observatory—star gazing. And meanwhile, I suppose, you were calling—'Moon, I am Venus....' He was blown up by a mine. And do you remember Lina? What a little girl she was, and yet she brought Shapovalov in.... I shall never forget them. You said that I would throw you up. But we can never throw each other up—we were on the mound together...."

"Last summer, before we got to Orsha, you told me you want to go to the Amur, do you remember? I asked you—why? You said: 'There are tigers there,' and I thought you meant tanks...."

"No, I meant real, live tigers, with stripes. We'll go there, and to the Caucasus too. Reading Lermontov is not enough, you want to climb the mountains yourself. We'll travel a lot, work a lot, laugh a lot and love a lot, all right?..."

He called his pup. It was the same pup, following at his heels; but he had changed its name a year ago. He said: "Henceforth 'Doctor Goebbels' will be known as Gepka. I respect his grey hairs; we must not insult a good, honest dog." Gepka had indeed grown grey, more subdued, and was reluctant to show off his tricks.

"Are you glad you are back in your home country, Gepka? What, you renounce it?... I am glad to be in your country, though, glad I came, and will be gladder when I leave it. You are going to see Moscow, Gepka but on one condition: you must not bark at the militiamen,

or at Mum. We will probably arrive in June or July, Olya. It will be very hot. I suppose the first thing you will ask for will be ice cream. We will arrive at the Byelorussian Station. Then Gorky Street. The house that Pushkin mentions, with those nice lions. Then the house with the statue of Lepeshinskaya on the roof. On the right, Pushkin's monument. Chirping children in the boulevard, and their mamas sleepy from the heat. Then down Metrostroyevskaya Street. To tell the truth, we ought to turn before that, down the Sadovaya, but we must pay our respects to Pushkin. It was near the Pushkin monument that I mused: 'caress me, thy caresses are sweeter to me than myrrh and wine.' I was thirteen then, and I disdained kisses. . . . They had to be caresses. . . . And then, straight off to Mum. You will see what a lovely Mum I have. . . ."

Olya's face expressed profound joy and amazement at the world. (It was precisely this amazement that people who did not know her well took for fright.) She was going towards the world with Mitya. . . .

They long continued their stroll along the golden paths amidst the lilac. They did not talk any more. words seemed superfluous, so identical were their thoughts and feelings. Only when they got home, where Lieutenant Korushkin was waiting for them, did Minayev stop to whisper in Olya's ear:

"I forgot to tell you. . . . We have won the war—that's absolutely definite."

* 29 *

Galochka was lying on the ground waiting for Paul, the S.S. man. She was too exhausted to work any more, and so Paul would come with a huge dog, and the dog would rush at her. That is how they killed Vera, the French girl Claude, and the Hungarian Jewess Mira. But the S.S. man did not come. Galochka swooned. When she regained consciousness there were lots of automobiles near. Zina cried out: "Americans!" Galochka was picked up and carried to the hospital. She lay there three days thinking: Won't I see our men? When she got out into the fresh air her head swam and she clung to the wall for support. A car flying the Red Cross arrived. A cheerful American photographed the girls, shouting: "Koroshio! Koroshio!" Zina said: "You are right, it is khoroshio." . . .* The Negro driver ran up, he had a black face and dazzling white teeth; he gave Galochka a bar of chocolate and tapped his chest, as much as to say: "With all my heart." It was a windy day, rain fell, and then it cleared up. . . . But when Galochka saw the first Red Army man it was raining again, in slanting streaks that glistened in the sun like silvery threads. Galochka threw her arms around the Red Army man and burst into tears. He was a tall man, no longer young; his cheeks, long unshaven, were covered with grey bristle. He was embarrassed at first and then cried out:

* Good.—*Tr.*

"Why, these are our girls! . . ."

"What's happened?" Galochka enquired.

The answer came:

"The Germans have surrendered. . . . Victory. . . ."

And the soldiers asked Galochka:

"Where are you from, girlie?"

Galochka was exhausted, but she answered, she could not remain silent.

"I am from the penal camp. No, I am from Kiev. I lived on Shevchenko Boulevard. We were taken from there long ago—before Stalingrad. We worked in a factory. There was a vicious German woman there, her name was Christine. She used to slap our faces. There were some Frenchmen there. Pierre was confident that the Red Army would be victorious. He told us that Kiev had been liberated. He died. I suppose I am an old woman now, but I was young. . . . I was taken to the penal camp. There were girls from all countries there, lots of our Soviet girls. I forgot how to speak Russian. . . . Do you know how we used to speak? 'I did not get up when the Appell was sounded so the polizei-frau beat me up.' 'The Aufitzerfrau knocked out one of Janina's eyes.' 'The Stubefrau reported that Nadya couldn't work any more, so she was gassed.' When any of the girls couldn't work any more Paul brought his dog and it mauled them to death, or else they dragged them into a gas van, we said they were 'gassed.' Nadya had a sweetheart, his name is Yegor Nikitenko, he is in the Tanks. If any of you meet him, tell him that when Nadya was being dragged to the gas van, she called to her motherland and to Yegor. It was easier for me, I have nobody, I had Uncle Lyonya, but the Germans killed him. . . . Comrades! Dear comrades! . . . I can't talk, but I can't remain silent. . . . You . . . you are the first to come. . . . We knew you were near, one of their officer women came and said: 'Don't be so glad, we'll kill you all.' Colette, a French girl, said that our Soviet forces are near Berlin, I don't know who told her that, but Paul came up in a furious rage and set his dog on Masha Udaltsova. Masha came from the Crimea, she was a good singer. We were not allowed to sing, but she sang a song about our sailors. It ran like this:

*For nearly twelve months, caught in a close ring,
Like lions we fought together.
But when the knell of Sevastopol did ring,
We went down to the sea bed together. . . .*

"We had a Party organization; we worked with the French and Czech girls. On the October anniversary we took a vow to remain loyal. That was the time they gassed Shura Vinogradova. Zina set fire to the

sawmill. . . . You are here, Comrades. I can't believe my eyes. Where are you from?"

"I'm from Kiev," answered one of the Red Army men. "I lived in Pechersky Street. . . ."

"From Kiev? Pechersky Street! . . . Oh, how glad I am! . . ."

She sat on the grass, pale and so haggard that the men turned their heads away, sighed and clenched their fists: what they did to the girl! But Galochka's eyes gleamed, they were cloudy, and yet they shone, they scanned the billowy, pink clouds, the grass patch overgrown with dandelions, and the soldiers' faces. Suddenly she laughed.

"What are you laughing at, girlie?" enquired the elderly soldier whom Galochka had embraced when he got out of the truck.

"I don't know. . . . I haven't laughed for a long time, in fact, I forgot how to laugh. In Kiev I used to laugh, often, for no reason at all. I worked at the Head Office of the Cotton Industry, would go to the theatre, talk to Raya, or to Valya, and suddenly I would burst out laughing. When I was asked what I was laughing at, I didn't know what to say. . . . You say the Germans have surrendered? There, I told you so! And you are from Kiev, lived in Pechersky Street. . . . I used to go there often, Uncle Lyonya lived there. . . . Oh, how they tormented us, they wanted us to bow down to them. But I wouldn't, I never forgot that I am a Soviet girl. Now I can laugh. . . . I told you my name is Gálina, Galochka. In Kiev they called me the laughing girl. . . . And so the laughing girl has come to life again. Oh, my dear, darling comrades! . . ."

They took her to the battalion hospital base. She sat in an open car, very pale, but smiling; then she looked round to say good-bye to the soldiers, and the setting sun tinted her face a rosy hue and the wind ruffled her fair hair.

* 30 *

The Americans were to arrive at midday on the eighth of May; centres had been arranged for the reception of the liberated citizens of different countries. Osip decided to give the guests a treat. The cottage was tidied up and a huge bouquet of flowers was placed on the table. The cook, his face flushed with heat and zeal, asked for the hundredth time: "Do they eat sucking pig?" . . .

Major Smiddle was tall and dark, his hair slightly streaked with grey. He did not know what to say to the Reds, so he smiled politely. Captain Mackhorn, on the contrary, felt quite at ease, laughed loudly, gesticulated, sat with one leg crossed over the other and kept on repeating: "I love everything Russian."

The Americans arrived with an interpreter who said to Osip: "My father was born in Vilno, he left Russia when the tsar still reigned. His name is Gerstein, in America he changed it to Garstone. I must tell you, I'm a bum interpreter, I get it about one-tenth right. . . ."

But Sergeant Garstone was too modest, he understood everything, and was a conscientious interpreter. The only trouble with him was that he was fond of using Russian proverbs, and he misquoted most of them. He said: "Words are not chickens,"* "Neither the street nor the city,"** "Eisenhower is an ace in strategy, but Patton doesn't eat out of a bast shoe, either."***

The cook need not have worried; the guests did justice to the food, and particularly to the drinks. The orderly afterwards related: "They poured vodka into large tumblers and sat sipping it. After a while I looked and the tumblers were full again. I cleared the table and brought in the tea. but they were still at it—guzzling, as if it were a syrup. it was terrible to see..."

Mackhorn asked Osip how the victory was being celebrated in Moscow. Osip answered that the celebrations would probably take place next day, after everything had been signed in Berlin. Mackhorn laughed:

"In America they are already celebrating. We Americans are always in a hurry."

Osip recalled the summer of nineteen forty-two, the steppe. Mina-yev's dreaming. The Americans were not in a hurry then...

Mackhorn, his face flushed from vodka, yelled:

"The English are snails; you can fall asleep before they creep out of their shells. But we don't like to lose time. We are a young nation—like you. Tell me, Major, where did you get all the medals. You must be a regular army officer, right?"

"No, I was a cost accountant before the war."

"Oh, that's fine! It's a splendid profession. If you've got a good head on you, you can earn twenty thousand dollars a year at that profession in America. How many dollars does the average cost accountant earn in Russia?"

"Really, I can't tell you. I don't know the value of the dollar. And the system of payment is different in Russia..."

"Well, never mind, you'll get on your feet and then you too will have dollars. Yours is a very big country, like America. We helped you during the war, and I think we'll help you later too. We want to see order established everywhere. We are fed up with having to liberate Europe and then having to feed her every twenty-five years. I love everything Russian. I like the way you fought, I like the way you dance, squatting, I saw it once, in a cabaret. And I like vodka too. I know your social system is different from ours. Your system wouldn't suit Americans. But that's your business... For example, you have only one

* He should have said: Words are not sparrows—meaning: it is possible to catch sparrows, but words, once dropped, cannot be recalled.—*Tr.*

** He should have said: Neither village nor town—neither here nor there.—*Tr.*

*** But Patton is no hick, either.—*Tr.*

political party; I don't think that's enough for a big country like yours. We hung around in England for six months. They have three parties there; one's more progressive, and the other is more conservative, why they want a third, I don't know, but that's their business. In America we have two parties, both progressive—the Democrats stand for a republic, and the Republicans stand for democracy. You may say they are both alike, but we can choose. The Major smokes Chesterfields, I prefer Camels; they say you can't tell the difference between them in the dark, both have the same flavour, but what pleases me is that I can choose, and I smoke only Camels. . . . Some of our officers think we will quarrel with you Russians because you are Communists. I am glad to have met you. When I get back home I will tell them that the Russian Communists are quite different from the American brand. I suppose you are a Communist too, am I right? I thought so. . . . And you are a major. You will be a cost accountant again soon. So you are human, like myself. But in America Communists are either lunatics or bandits. Take me, for example, I started with ten cents, but now I own a fairly large waterproof clothing factory. I have discovered a substance that keeps the rain out and yet allows the air to get to the body. That idea is worth a hundred thousand dollars. If the Communists confiscate my factory it will be sheer robbery—I acquired it by honest labour. . . .”

The interpreter could barely keep up with the Captain; perspiration rolled down his face. When the Captain paused for a moment the Sergeant put in a word on his own account:

“All he is saying is not worth listening to. He is a heavy drinker and he has a loose tongue.”

Mackhorn could not sit still; he jumped up and waved his arms. Major Smiddle smiled apologetically and said to Osip:

“Don't be surprised at what Captain Mackhorn is saying, he is a typical Northerner. I'm from Louisiana. It would be nice if you could pay us a visit, there's some beautiful country there. We have still preserved the patriarchal way of life, we like to dream, and know how to entertain guests. True, the spirit of the North is spreading South; factories, hurry and bustle, talk about dollars. But still, New Orleans is not New York. There is more cordiality among us. I think we can understand the Russians better than the Northerners. I know you had a big writer, Tolstoy. I once saw a film based on his novel. There was a wonderfully poetic scene in it—a criminal racing to a suburban night club in a three-horse sleigh. Then he took the bell from the horse's neck and drank vodka out of it.”

“I am sorry I haven't a bell,” said Osip. “Permit me to offer you some vodka in an ordinary tumbler.”

The Major thanked Osip and, for the sixth or seventh time, drank to victory. Mackhorn drank without any special invitation and talked incessantly:

"Major, put your signature on this dollar, will you, please? It will be a historic dollar—a souvenir of our meeting on the Elbe on Victory Day. You fought magnificently! When we read about Stalingrad, we all said it beat the record for resistance. I have a cousin, he is a lawyer, he hates the Russians because they are Reds, but even he said it 'absolutely beat the record for heroism.' Lots of dollars for the Russians were collected in America at that time. I am particularly pleased that I have met you on a day like this, I will tell my wife and all my friends about it. You can believe me: Jim Mackhorn is not a diplomat, he is plain and straightforward, and if he says he loves the Russians, he means it. I don't care what social system you have. To me, you are not a Communist, but a good soldier. And I have no doubt that you are a good cost accountant. That's a good profession in America too. I never ask my customers what their views are. I sell to Catholics and to Communists, even to Negroes. The Major is a Southerner, they have lots of prejudices, we in the North are much more broad-minded. Of course, I wouldn't keep company with darkies, but it makes no difference to me whom I sell to—whites or blacks. No trade means no progress, and ours is the most progressive country in the world. Some of our officers say that you supply the American Communists with dollars. I don't believe it. You are businessmen, and I suppose you want to get dollars. If that's the case, it makes no difference to you whom you get the dollars from—Democrats or Republicans. The Communists can't give you anything because they are all bums. I want to ask you a question. . . . I am talking to you quite frankly—as soldier to soldier. I have looked at the map, yours is a vast country, if we supply you with dollars you will build many new cities. What I don't understand, Major, is, why you want foreign cities. . . ."

"What cities? . . . Do you mean to say you don't understand why we have captured Berlin? . . ."

"Oh, no! Berlin, that's swell. I have already drunk to the capture of Berlin, but I will drink to it again. . . . I mean other cities. I have read that you have taken Riga and Belgrade without our consent. . . ."

Osip felt like showing this insolent guest the door, but he restrained himself:

"It's evident that you don't know what you are talking about. Riga is a Soviet city. And Belgrade is the capital of Yugoslavia, we have only helped to liberate the city. . . ."

The interpreter lost patience. He said to Osip:

"Don't pay any attention to the Captain. He's drunk, and besides, he's an idiot, he reads trashy newspapers and believes what they say. Only a coffin can improve a man like that."*

Osip was tired of the shouting, the laughter, and of the hostility that could be detected in the harangues of the loquacious Captain, and

* Another misquoted proverb: Only a coffin can straighten a hunchback.—Tr.

in the cautious reticence of the Major. They reverted to the question of repatriation.

Major Smiddle said:

"Many of our truck drivers are coloured men. I hope your men won't mind."

Osip answered in surprise:

"Why should they?..."

"Our men will not stay with coloured people, not for anything. It is difficult for you to understand this—your country is inhabited by people of one race."

"People of different races inhabit our country, but you are right—it is difficult for us to understand."

The Russian's tone seemed offensive to Major Smiddle. Everybody knows that there is no freedom among the Russians. I have been courteous and have refrained from telling him what I think about his country. I merely mentioned cautiously that Americans differed with them on the Polish problem.... Why does that Red refuse to understand the peril Americans would be confronted with if they failed to guard against promiscuity with coloured people?... So Major Smiddle said:

"Have you a daughter, Major?"

"I had one...."

Smiddle sighed in commiseration, but insisted on the question 'that he had often asked in Europe:

"If your daughter were alive, Major, would you allow her to marry a man of an inferior race?"

"Major, my daughter was murdered by men who reasoned like you...."

At last the guests went away. On saying good-bye to Osip, Sergeant Garstone said:

"The Major is an idiot, too. I don't know which of them is worse, both, probably. My father left Russia when the tsar still reigned, but he told me: 'When I saw the skyscrapers I thought to myself: the houses in Vilno are little, but the people there have big hearts.'... Don't be angry with me, Major, for having been obliged to translate all their rot. I am only a sergeant. But just now I am very proud that my father was born in Vilno...."

In the evening Osip's old comrades-in-arms came to visit him—Leonidze, Polishchuk, Chaly and Sharikov.... They celebrated the victory. The cook was delighted: so I didn't work only for the Americans; our men will enjoy the stuff too....

"I wonder when Moscow will proclaim it? This evening or tomorrow?..."

"We must listen in all the time...."

"I suppose Stalin will speak...."

Leonidze enquired:

"What about the Americans? . . . Did you reach an agreement?"

Osip was reluctant to tell them about the painful meeting; why spoil the festivities? We would tell them later. . . . So he answered:

"Yes, we reached an agreement."

All that day his mind had been taken up with his conversation with the Americans. They are strangers, of course, nobody pictured them otherwise. . . . But I did think they had more sense, I thought the war had taught them something. . . . But they sang the same old song. . . . The Major said "the Germans are good organizers." What he likes in Germany is obvious. How does he differ from the German fascists? . . . And the Captain blurted out everything they write: slander, lies, malice. . . . One is a slaveowner, the other a money-grubber. The interpreter was right: "both are worse." . . . How annoying that fate should have brought me a present like that today of all days. . . .

Polishchuk drank a toast to the regiment and then said:

"The main thing is that it is all over now. I will go back to my home in Nezhin. I've had enough of teaching Fritzes—with a rod of iron. Our kiddies in the Ukraine are waiting, I've got to teach them. . . ."

Sharikov went into raptures about his factory: I have received a letter asking me to come back. They are building new departments. Leonidze was anxious: will I be able to catch up with my studies? It will feel strange to sit down to books after all this, but I want to study. . . . Chaly talked about his literary plans: he would certainly write a three hundred and twenty-page book. They talked about their dear ones. Polishchuk said: "My Kostya is such a little rascal, simply impossible! . . ." Leonidze spoke about his mother, his cottage at the foot of the mountain, and the vineyards. . . .

For a moment the white sand of Bahby Yar rose before Osip's eyes. He got up and said he was going to get some cigarettes: he stood by the window in the next room. Nothing was visible—neither stars nor lights. Raya stood before Osip, her long eyelashes fluttered, she whispered: "You don't know how I love you, you don't know a thing." . . .

The comrades were aware of Osip's grief. During the past three years they had learned to know and to love him. Leonidze said to him:

"Come and visit my home. It's a perfect Paradise. I'll treat you to such wine. . . ."

"There is no wine in Nezhin, except cucumbers, perhaps," said Polishchuk, laughing, "but you must come and visit me. It's not far from Kiev. . . . We'll have long talks, we'll have things to reminisce over. What do you intend to do when you are demobilized? Go to Kiev? . . ."

Osip answered reluctantly:

"I don't know. . . . I'll do what I am told."

"Well, suppose you are told to choose?"

"I'll remain in the army."

Osip frowned: They'll think it's because I have no family. no

home. . . . But it is not so. There's work for me everywhere. In Kiev. On the Pechora. And I have a home everywhere—I have fought for it. . . . Polishchuk says: "It's a good thing it's all over." I don't know. . . . I heard those two talk, and everything became overclouded. We, of course, want it to be all over. But there may be people who will want to start all over again. . . .

Leonidze said:

"You will do well to remain in the Army. You are a splendid commander. Let me hug you. . . ."

They went out on the verandah. It was a quiet, rural night. A dog barked somewhere in the distance. They enjoyed the unaccustomed quiet. Osip said:

"What a joy it is that we have won! For the first time tonight the folks at home can sleep calmly and not worry about their husbands, sons, or fathers. So we haven't marched from the Volga to the Elbe for nothing—we have restored to the people their peace of mind. . . ."

* 31 *

Dumas was released on the eleventh of April. Among the American officers was a lecturer at the Harvard University who had heard of the French scientist, and so the aged professor was despatched to Paris in an aeroplane. He was very feeble, could not walk, and spoke with difficulty. After examining him Dr. Morillot said: "It's a real miracle! I can't understand how he survived." . . .

Dumas lay in bed at home. Marie cooked for him, brought him lilies of the valley, and went to church to light a taper for the professor. Slowly he returned to life. He would not tell anybody what he had gone through. He said: "I prefer not to recall it." . . . Only once did he say to Morillot: "While the big war was raging on the various fronts, I was waging a little one. . . . There was an S.S. man there, his name was Hubert. It would have been easy for him, of course, to torture me to death, to burn me in the crematorium, but that did not satisfy him—he wanted me to humble myself before him—to report somebody, or beg for some favour. . . ." "Well, and how did it end?" enquired Morillot. Dumas answered: "Can't you see? . . . He lost." During the last few days the professor's health had greatly improved. He read the newspapers, joked with Marie. On the morning of the eighth of May Morillot came with the latest news.

"What took place in Reims was the rehearsal. The gala performance is to take place in Berlin today. . . ."

Dumas smiled:

"How glad I am that I have lived to see this day. I told one fool, an anthropologist, he came here to see me, captured cities . . . I told him how it would end. . . ."

Dumas filled his blackened pipe with tobacco dust. Morillot shook his head:

"It would be better if you didn't smoke. . . ."

"Nonsense! If the smoke of the crematorium didn't kill me. . . . Better tell me how things are here, in Paris. We haven't had a real talk about things yet. . . ."

"How things are here? Rotten. It was splendid in August, when the Germans were kicked out. Even I yielded to the general mood. People believed that everything would change. They are only human. . . . Then came the winter. Awful. . . . I don't only mean that people were hungry and cold. Everybody realized that nothing had changed, or would change. . . ."

The sounds of cheering crowds came through the open window. Morillot continued:

"Of course, they are happy today, it's a holiday. But everybody realizes now that this is not the victory we dreamed of. We did not liberate ourselves, others liberated us. There's a saying that the charcoal burner is master in his own house, but we have no charcoal, we are not even charcoal burners—strangers are the bosses here. . . . We are now approximately what Italy was after the first world war. Or, if you want something more lofty, like King David in his old age, when he had to be supported under the arms. . . . The Americans are saying to de Gaulle: 'Now then, General, climb down, or else we'll take Blum,' and to Blum they are saying: 'Learn, young man, and you'll get on in the world.' . . ."

Morillot laughed loudly.

"But what about the people?" enquired Dumas.

"Playing their usual role of the Sleeping Beauty, who is kissed not in order to be wakened, but to be put to sleep for a hundred years. They did a lot of shooting, cheered, and then the boss came along, stamped his foot and said: 'That's enough!' The place hasn't even been aired—it stinks of traitors. If any of them are being tried, it's the small fry. Some of the factory owners who made tens of millions under the Germans have received something in the nature of a public censure, but they have been allowed to keep their millions. Now the partisans are being jailed for having made 'illegal arrests.' I have seen a poster in which Pinaud comes out as a representative of the Resistance: the new Jeanne d'Arc. The company that Lancier now assembles is the queerest mixture: Americans, Pinaud, Garcy, Catholics. . . . By the way, Lancier has also become pious, 'pon my word of honour! All his life he shouted that the smell of incense sickened him, but now he goes to church, and a week ago he told me that the dogma of the immaculate conception suited him perfectly. I thought he was worrying about his liver, but he took offence when I suggested that and said: 'Only the Church can save France from Communism.' They are playing up everything: the seven-foot general, dollars, incense, and even a story about Bolsheviks

hacking off the fingers of all Frenchmen to get their rings. It turns out that the Germans were beaten not by the Russians, but by Our Lady of Lourdes and American condensed milk. In short, the tragedy is ended. we can now pass to current garbage. . . . I hope to put you on your feet soon. Only you must avoid all excitement. . . .”

Dumas smiled:

“I must live another two or three years—I want to finish my work. It is very important now to dispel this nonsense about racial distinctions. They have infected the whole world with their superstitions. As for excitement, it can’t be avoided—it’s the times we are living in. . . . I am going to surprise you now—yesterday I sent in an application for membership of the Communist Party. Do you approve?”

“No, I don’t. Both for considerations of your health and my conception of human liberty. René is a Communist too, we have arguments nearly every night. I agree that, at present, the Communists are pleasanter people than the rest, if only for the reason that they are not in power. I have no objection to the confiscation of Pinaud’s millions. But humans will be humans; when one injustice is removed another appears. You yourself have told me more than once that the Communists were repulsive to you because of their sectarianism. . . .”

“I have learnt something during the past few years. When I was out there I didn’t only fight S.S. men, I did a bit of thinking. . . . Even now I don’t like everything about the Communists, but of what importance are these details? The fate of civilization is at stake; but you tell me: the man who will save it has a wart on his cheek. Sembat complains that they prefer coloured picture postcards to Cézanne. But I cannot be bothered with warts, or even with painting, now. I have been in Buchenwald, Doctor. . . . I am thinking about what is the most important. Do you know why the Russians won the war? You surely will not deny that it was the Russians who won it? Compared with Stalingrad, the whole of Africa was a slight diversion; and they landed only after the Russians had smashed the Germans. Why, then, did the Russians win? Because they have not only a state, but a state plus an idea. I was in that damned camp two and a half years; there were different sorts of people there. I saw staunch Catholics, royalists, anybody you like. But the Communists behaved better than all the rest. Why? For the same reason—they have not only strong character, but strong character plus an idea. You criticize everything and everybody, that’s the easiest thing in the world, it’s in our blood. Once upon a time scepticism served as a stimulus; it has long become a soporific. . . .”

The strains of the “Marseillaise” and the “Internationale” came through the window. Dumas picked up the refrain:

*L’Internationale
Unites the human race. . . .*

"Listen, Morillot, we'll have to live through hard times. The Germans yelled that they were the 'Herrenvolk,' superior to all. In retaliation, every nation began to extol itself; that was natural—the law of self-preservation. But it's a short distance from this to nationalism, stupidity, blindness. Who can resist this? Only the Communists. In that camp we had Frenchmen, Russians, Poles, Czechs and Germans, and the Communists there found a common tongue. . . . That's another reason why I have become a Communist. I love France, I need not tell you that; but I also love mankind. . . ."

Morillot did not argue; he had enough arguing with René. So Dumas has also become infected. . . . Some are going over to the Church, others are going over to the Communists, the number of those who prefer the bitter truth is dwindling more and more. . . . So Morillot said:

"One thing I beg of you—avoid unnecessary excitement. You have gone through too much. The main thing is your heart. . . ."

Dumas smiled:

"When you talk about medicine, you know that there is a main thing. You don't say: What's the use of treating Dumas' heart if tomorrow he may catch cold, or upset his stomach? . . . Do you know what, Morillot? You will go the same way too. Only take care you are not too late. Every cause has its Stalingrad and its Normandy. . . ."

After Morillot left, Dumas gazed for a long time at the sunbeam that was playing on the ceiling. Then he got up. Marie became anxious:

"Where are you going, Monsieur Dumas? The doctor said you must keep in bed."

"It's the doctor's business to say that. To him, the heart is only a muscle. But there is another heart, in which doctors are not interested. . . . How can I stay in bed when there are festivities in the street? . . ."

He went out, leaning on a walking stick. It was sunny and noisy. People moved along in an unending procession, laughing, singing, carrying bright flags. The professor walked slowly along the pavement. He smiled at Paris, at victory, at life. A woman said to a little boy: "Be careful, Jeannot, you are pushing this old gentleman." . . . Dumas looked round in surprise—he seemed to have forgotten that he had aged and that it was to him that the term "old gentleman" applied. . . . He looked at the little boy who was waving a small paper flag. It was the son of Pepe-M'let. Dumas did not know Marie, and he had not heard of the heroic deed that Pepe had performed. Before him was a merry little fellow with an intractable tuft, holding a small red flag. And Dumas said to him:

"Now then, standard-bearer, you go in front and I'll go behind, and we'll march together. . . . Agreed?"

As was always the case with him in a crowd, Sembat felt happy; he loved the people, and was easily infected with their gaiety. All day he walked through the streets, sang, and in a hundred different keys repeated the as yet unaccustomed word "Victory." And, as always, when he returned to his studio, with its canvases and stuffy air, he became stern and gloomy. He felt that something had come to an end. From tomorrow onwards, he must live differently. He could no longer justify himself on the ground that there was a war on. But the long, hard day was reluctant to depart, it filled the twilight with shadows that were still quite near.

Léo, that big child whom the storm had taken unawares, had hidden here. Léontine had visited him here; they had talked to each other about happiness, and those simple words had been heartrending, Sembat had been unable to bear it and had turned away. In August Léontine said all that there had been to say: the tank burst into flames, and she fell to the ground near the house. Josette was here in the first winter; she looked at the pictures and talked about Paul. He was shot, she perished somewhere in the South. Here was a portrait that Sembat had been painting just before the war and had not finished. A dark-skinned girl in a canary-coloured frock, cherry-coloured lips, slightly parted. Her name was Margot. In the Gestapo they asked her where Bertrand was, but she did not tell them. They killed her. . . . Will all this pass away like a warm, spring mist?

No matter what Sembat thought about, his mind always reverted to art. Even now he was debating, perhaps with the epoch, perhaps with himself. Of course, some fellow will come along and paint a daub showing Léontine setting fire to the tank. And why not? If they make honey out of sawdust, why should there not be imitation art consisting of heroic reality and bad painting? Is it possible to portray in an ordinary landscape (a road, trees, the wind) that August when I crouched on the roof with a gun? I don't know. . . . Perhaps a different approach is needed. I don't believe those who say that they are indifferent towards events. I believe Goya. For many years he did good work but of no significance. he was a society portrait painter of the English school. And then the storm swept over Spain. Only then was he born. He was fifty-five then. He lived through the war, painted the shooting of the insurgents and made etchings that hovered before my eyes during the occupation. I knew how Léontine would perish, I knew Léo's executioners—Goya had shown them to me. . . . I don't want to be an upholsterer in Pinaud's house, I don't want to paint partisans in the style of the battle scenes at Versailles—the bigger the size, the bigger the pay. . . . I want to talk about man in the language of painting. But how can I express truth without betraying art?

At the end of April Mado came to see Sembat. He looked at her and thought: I love her more than ever, I will never cease to love her, and I will never confess my love to her. . . . Mado looked at the landscapes and said she liked them. Then her eyes became vacant, and she seemed to be sleeping with her eyes open. Perhaps, she recalled her meeting with Sergei here? . . . She said to Sembat, sadly but calmly: "What children we were before the war!" . . . And Sembat thought: Well, I have grown up, I no longer think of happiness. I want something else: to give expression to what people have died for, to what art came into the world for.

At one time Sembat had been of the opinion that an artist must be able to see, later he realized that the artist must understand the visible world, but now he knew that this too was not enough; the main thing was personal experience—inward and outward. The war has now left the fields and forests, it is knocking at the door of this studio and reminding me: you have experienced it, you knew Margot, you were present when Léo said farewell to Léontine. . . . The people in the street are rejoicing because the war is over. But for the artist it is not over—it is within him. he must produce something equal to Goya, or perish.

How simple things were in August: shoot! But there is a vow which must not be renounced. People think that art is the easiest thing: you have learnt to paint, so paint. But for this clever ideas, good will and skill are inadequate. It is not enough to see and understand. One must be consumed by passion. Art not only looks back, it not only has a good memory, it also possesses foresight. . . .

He was standing at the window. It seemed to him that shadows were closing in around him, calling, demanding, denouncing. Down below people were still marching, cheering, singing. Suddenly, the strains of the song that the partisans of Limousine were fond of, reached the studio:

*Others will greet the sun,
And laugh and drink and sing,
And perhaps forget the thing
That we too loved life and fun. . . .*

So that is what they are demanding—to say how the people who sacrificed their lives—Paul, Margot, the fighters at Stalingrad, the airmen, the partisans—wanted to live! . . . But how to say it? Sembat peered eagerly into the night as if wanting to see what was not visible. He stood at the window for a very long time. The city had fallen silent long ago. At last the night shuddered: everything became indistinct, vague, the eyes and heart ached. And then the outlines of Paris appeared against the very pale sky: distant towers, trees, roofs and chimneys. A man with a gun was lying on the tiles. He was staring with dead, glassy eyes. and

the blood looked as if it had been painted long ago—it was dull. Then, without undressing, Sembat lay down and at once fell asleep in the studio that was flooded with bright daylight.

* 33 *

On one of the common graves a monument had been erected, and today, Victory Day, the monument was to be unveiled. Mado and Lejean were walking down a long street. Old chestnut trees. The prison where Lejean was confined in nineteen forty. Opposite, a small café; one day a heavy shower came down and Sergei and Mado had run to take shelter in it; Sergei then told Mado how he had ridden in a cart in the steppe, and Mado, covering her eyes, had tried to picture what the steppe was like. Josette used to come to the prison wearing a dark blue costume. . . . Mado and Lejean walked on in silence, both taken up with their own thoughts.

Later Lejean said:

“How poor Paris is now!”

“And sad,” answered Mado, “and dear. . . .”

The tree leaves were still a tender green—it was only the beginning of May; there is something touching, trustful, in that tone. But the eyes of the people one met were dark and hard: the people knew everything. August had been followed by winter. . . . Paris all around; its houses had become grey and wrinkled. Many of those houses remembered how the sans-culottes had vowed to defend fraternity, and then had come the dudes and dandies of the Directoire, “divine” and “incomparable,” and began to lisp and to burr; a groom became a marquis with a lorgnette, and a bristle merchant acquired a nobleman’s coat of arms. The old grey houses witnessed eighteen forty-eight, the trees of liberty and General Cavaignac who drenched the narrow streets of the faubourgs with the blood of blue-bloused workingmen. The March wind of the Commune swept through the attics, winding staircases and basements and tore up the paving stones, and amidst the tender green of May, children on the walls of the fortifications tried to beat off the Versaillese with cobblestones. Is it possible to know, to remember so much? And how is it that the houses did not blurt out everything last summer when the soul of Paris had stirred again and barricades had cut across the streets? How long is it since August? Only eight months. But already (without noise, without guns) Thiers’ successors have taken control of Paris. The day before Lejean had heard a virtuous merchant who wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honour say: “The Boches have caused us considerable loss, but they did one useful thing. Unfortunately, they did not finish the job—there are still a lot of these Communists left.”. . .

Lejean had changed very much during these years; even that waiter with the good memory who had nearly betrayed Luc would probably not recognize him now. Josette’s death had been a very painful blow to him:

his personal life ended when the underground ended. When everybody was rejoicing, when people were thinking of their homes, of their dear ones, of walking in the park, of children's toys and of words of endearment, Lejean found himself alone. Sometimes he would walk down a street lost in thought and the sounds of a piano would come through an open window, and it would seem to him then that he was going home, that Josette was waiting for him and he was late. . . . Recently he had visited Sembat's studio to see the portrait of his son. Sembat had painted the portrait a long time ago, when Paul was still a lad. Sembat said to him: "Take the portrait." But Lejean shook his head: "I have nowhere to hang it. I have no home, and probably will not have, I have to travel a great deal, I seem to be living in railway stations." . . . Lejean felt some relief when he met Mado; he did not conceal from her the pain he was suffering: Mado had visited them, had known Josette, had played with Mimi. . . .

Just now he looked at her out of the corner of his eye. She had grown quite thin. She would not take a rest. . . . On her gaunt face her large eyes looked bigger than ever, they seemed to be separate from the face, they gleamed, flickered, burnt.

Mado had received the telegram from Voronov in February. She had not told anybody about Sergei's death, not even Lejean—she had wanted to tell him several times, but had been unable to. For many nights she had wept in her tiny room, had wept, without thinking, hot and simple tears, had wept not because she had lost Sergei—she had lost him long before—but because he was dead, she could not picture that to herself. All these years she had kept a lock on her heart, at times she had been angry with herself; to her love had seemed to be an encroachment—he is living his own life, and I have no right to encroach upon it even in my thoughts. . . . But now she would say to herself: I love him, and I will never cease to love him, this will never be again. I gave him everything. She always saw him alive. For some reason it seemed to her that the mountains of Yugoslavia were like Limousine, with the same beech and alder groves. Sergei with a gun was climbing the slope of the mountain. And Miki was singing: "we fain would stay with thee, but such is fate's decree. . . ." And she was saying to Sergei: "It's true, we fain would stay with thee, but you see—fate's decree. . . . All that I wrote you was not true. I have no family. I am yours, as before. It's a good thing you did not receive that letter; I had never told you an untruth before, and never will. You are my love. Do you remember the merry-go-round in the Place d'Italie? There were lots and lots of lights. But now Paris is very dark. I can't see anything." . . . It seemed to Mado that Sergei was walking at her side over the mountains of Limousine—Bear, Dédé, Miki. A big bridge. . . . Dozing off, she would suddenly scream: she was in prison. "Sergei! . . ." And Sergei would answer: "Don't believe that I have been killed, I am coming, I will be

with you in a moment.”... He was leading her out of prison, standing in front of her, his head thrown back and his eyes screwed up. Darling!...

She looked to see whether the blue slip of paper (Voronov's telegram) was safe in her handbag—she never parted with it.

Lejean said:

“I think there will be a big crowd there, I am glad it was fixed for Victory Day.... We must show them that we are not afraid of them. Do you remember, Mado, how, in nineteen forty-two, we used to try and guess what it would be like after victory? I don't think I can be accused of having been too optimistic. But still, I didn't think it would be like this.... It's surprising how quickly they have forgotten.... I don't mean the Vichyites—this is their triumph. But the others too.... I met Garcy yesterday. I saw him in nineteen forty-three; he was connected with the A.S. then. Yesterday he said to me: “The Communists want to cause a split. I hope the nation will support de Gaulle.”... I didn't think he was capable of such strong emotion—he was ever so much calmer towards the Germans. They hate us. Naturally, we are the victors in this war. If anybody saved the honour of France, it was the F.T.P.... The people know this. I was in Oradour recently. Few have survived there. But all those who have are now Communists. It cannot be otherwise—blood has its rights....”

A gravestone; a simple epitaph: “The Heroes of the F.T.P.” A profusion of flowers—lilies of the valley, violets, multi-coloured anemones, white and gold stars of narcissus, lilac, tulips and the first gillyflowers. Thousands and thousands of people around: grey-haired workers in crumpled caps, prisoners of war returned from Germany, partisans, wounded men who had fought on the Rhine, former prisoners in German camps, wrinkled old women, children, anglers and cycle-racing fans, dreamers and bullies, iron moulders, bricklayers, turners, dock labourers, mechanics, tanners, printers, automobile drivers, carpenters, cooks, bakers, navvies, young women, schoolchildren, veterans, people with calloused hands carrying flowers, old and eternally youthful Paris.

Mado is speaking:

“I want to speak of those I knew. Comrade Lejean had a son. I knew Paul when he was a boy. He was only just starting out in life. He was like this spring day. He gave his group the name ‘Stalingrad.’ That was in the dark days, when France was still silent.... They attacked Germans, Paul was wounded. They tortured him, but he did not name anybody. The Communists never named anybody. I have seen the Gestapo, the Germans tortured Maurice there. He did not name anybody.... The butchers used to say to each other: ‘It's no use wasting time, he won't say anything, he's a Communist.’... I want to speak about Milet, in the Resistance he was called Pepe. In nineteen forty-one he shot a Gestapo man. Before his execution he wrote a letter—not to his wife, not to a

friend, but to the Party. The Party was his love; it is our love, our Party!... The gravediggers of France slander us and shout: "The Communists are bad Frenchmen!"... Who can love our country more than Jeannot Milet did? He grew up in Suresnes, he fell in love in Suresnes, and he was shot there... France, dear France—these words are not written in ink, they are written in the blood of the partisans, the blood of the Communists! Let the dead say what they died for. Not that France should again be ruled by traitors, German agents, by men who hurried to exchange their German marks for dollars. I want to say that we are not alone. With us are the partisans of Yugoslavia, the partisans of Norway, the Belgian partisans—they may be hounded now, but they will not be driven from their land—the miners of Borinage, the steel smelters of Liège. We have a great friend, he came to our rescue, he will not betray us—I mean the Stalingrad people. I mention Stalingrad here, at the grave of our French heroes. The butchers of Paris were defeated on the Volga. We had a Russian officer in the unit I belonged to. The Germans took him prisoner when he was lying with a bullet wound in his chest in the steppe. He escaped and came to our partisans. We called him Bear. He was one of the first to enter Limoges. I want to speak of those I knew. I knew a Russian. He fought at Stalingrad. He loved Paris. He died in the mountains of Yugoslavia; he was the bearer of liberty. He lived like Paul Lejean, like Josette, like Guy Mocquet, like Sampaix, like Miki; one thing inspired him: our truth, our passion, our faith. One may be unfaithful to one's word, friend, husband or wife, but one must not be unfaithful to the dead. Over this grave let us take the vow: in spite of rocks, in spite of heat, in spite of blood, to continue up the mountain until we reach the summit! We swear!"

Through the waste plots and streets of the suburb, and through Paris, there resounded like a mountain echo: "We swear!"

The sun was setting. Words were still ringing. Heavy wreaths were still being borne, and towards the end of the day the fragrance of the flowers was exceptionally sweet. Apart from the crowd, near a tree, stood a young woman in a grey dress. She was staring down the long street, her eyes wide open. But she saw neither the people, nor the grey houses, nor the big wreath—dark green leaves and red roses. She was waiting. Sergei was coming towards her. This was not a street, it was an avenue; the rain had stopped and everything smelt of damp leaves. Mado said: "I did not say what I wanted to say."... Sergei asked: "What?"... And she answered: "What I have said just now."...

* 34 *

Neither her friends, nor her professors, nor her neighbours guessed what Valya was going through: during the war years this little and seemingly frail woman had taught herself to bury her feelings very deep.

One of the neighbours said to her husband: "What can you make of it?... If anybody was faithful, it certainly looked as though she was—always worrying, waiting for letters; but when she got the news she didn't even cry."... Only Nina Georgiyevna knew what was going on in Valya's heart, although even in her presence Valya never wept once.

Nina Georgiyevna did not inform Vasya that she was gravely ill: shortly after she received the news of Sergei's death, she caught pleurisy. Evidently, the life of an evacuee had weakened her; nearly every day the doctor diagnosed some new illness. But she never complained, except that every morning, when she tried to get up, she would break out in perspiration and, smiling guiltily, would say to Valya: "I'll have to lie in bed awhile yet."... Valya spent all her spare time with her; they often talked about Sergei, outwardly calm, as if he had merely gone on a long journey. Valya infected Nina Georgiyevna with her own restraint. She told Valya a lot about Sergei's childhood and early youth; Valya listened eagerly—it seemed to her that she was discovering Sergei anew. She herself rarely said anything, she had nothing to relate about Sergei. There were moments when it seemed to her that Sergei had not revealed himself to her; vague, fragmentary images slipped through her mind like sand running through the fingers. But later, on collecting her thoughts, she would say to herself: no, it is not true, Sergei is within me—it is not a matter of dates in his life, his actions (I know little about his life before we met, about how he fought), he gave me the most important—his passion, his agitation, his heart. That is why everything in his life is so intelligible to me—down to trifles, mistakes, fascinations, that impulse which carried him into the mountains of Serbia, everything, everything.

At night she would lie motionless on her back with her eyes open. Enormous strength of will was needed after nights like that to go to the studio, talk to people, smile, play the part of a merry collective farm girl, or of a designing duchess, and to nurse Nina Georgiyevna, to introduce peace and quiet into her life. Lying in bed at night, Valya thought of nothing: her sense of loss was as acute as physical pain. Too vivid was her memory of Sergei, of his arms, of his lips, of the way, on the night before his departure, he had wearily fallen asleep with his heavy, warm head upon her breast.

This seemingly everlasting pain helped her to cling to life: this feeling was so strong and tenacious, it so encompassed her whole being, that involuntarily (she had never thought about it) she found an outlet in art. Now people said of her: "She shows signs of unusual talent." and the more acute her pain, the more frequently was such praise expressed. None of those who admired her gifts suspected the price she paid for that vibrating voice, for that concentrated and yet distant look in her eyes, and for that imperative and yet helpless gesture, which seemed to say: don't ask, I see everything....

In April Nina Georgiyevna left her bed, and at once, in spite of the doctor's prohibition and Valya's pleading she went back to her work. She said: "I have neglected the children, I mustn't be ill any longer." She returned home in the evenings tired; she slept badly at night. The doctor prescribed a sleeping draught. She said: "I am afraid to take it, it feels like dropping into an abyss, but I sleep soundly."...

In the evening of the eighth of May the whole of Moscow waited for the climax: people telephoned each other and asked: "Are you listening in?"... Nina Georgiyevna too waited at the radio receiver, but was unable to wait to the end, she felt too tired; she took a dose of luminal, went to bed and soon fell asleep.

Valya went to bed too, but she did not sleep—she lay with open eyes. She heard the "plate" that hung in the hall as soon as it began to speak.

Of course, Valya, like everybody else, had expected this communication, nevertheless, she was agitated; she dressed quietly, so as not to wake Nina Georgiyevna, and went into the street. Day was breaking. People looked out from the other houses. An old woman ran up to Valya and embraced and kissed her. Not thinking of where she was going. Valya traced her steps to the Red Square. People were already in the Square, dazed with joy. There was no singing, no cheering, profound, solemn silence reigned.

During the last moments before she got to the Square, Valya did not walk, she ran, as she had run four years before, on approaching the house where Sergei had lived. All the accumulated vagueness and heaviness of heart of the last few months was suddenly dissolved in the profound joy of that early hour. In a flash Valya realized that Sergei had triumphed, had fought through, lived through, he was alive, he was rejoicing, gazing at his native city.... And this was Valya's bond with others too: with that one-armed officer, that elderly woman who was biting her lip, with the two soldiers who had not yet managed to shave and wash, with that young girl in the beret, who was looking into everybody's face as if searching for somebody. People congratulated Valya and she congratulated them, she kissed the one-armed officer. The crowd kept on growing. Valya gazed at the Kremlin, gleaming in the light of the rising sun, ancient and restlessly young. And on her face appeared the smile that always transfigured her, the smile that Sergei had recalled so many times. Valya stood facing the Kremlin wall, smiling. A cameraman photographed her; she asked in surprise: "Why me?..." The photographer did not answer. A woman, her eyes red with weeping, said to Valya: "Let me kiss you."...

Nina Georgiyevna was still asleep. When she opened her eyes Valya said to her: "Victory!"... They embraced, and for the first time during all this period both, no longer ashamed, burst into tears. Later Nina Georgiyevna said reproachfully: "Why didn't you wake me?..." Valya

was at a loss what to say; it seemed to her that she had stolen out of the house to go and meet Seryozha, but she could not tell her that.

Nina Georgiyevna went to the Red Square. There was no organized demonstration, no columns, but the people flocked there. Here were Sergei's comrades, the sappers who remembered the Volga, partisans from the forests of Bryansk and the Nalibok. A girl wearing a medal passed by—it was the very same Tanya who the summer before, in the hut near Minsk, had admired the Major of the Engineers. Lieutenant Sazonov, of the "Avengers" partisan unit passed by. His hand was in a sling. When the crowd picked him up and tossed him he said: "Why me? I haven't done anything particular."... Maria Mikhailovna Minayeva asked him sternly: "Did you catch Hitler?" She was dressed in her best for the holiday, and she told strangers around her: "My Mitenka is in Bérlin" (emphasizing the first syllable). A blind soldier passed, led by a girl; he stared with his unseeing eyes and smiled: he saw victory. An old woman passed, carrying a large photograph and saying: "Let my Vanya see it too"—her son was killed near Budapest. And there was so much deep, virginal joy, so many quiet tears, so much silent triumph, that faces, words and fates vanished. Nina Georgiyevna said to herself: "How well Stalin put it when he spoke about the people—it's true, they are immortal. . . ."

As happens, sometimes, with elderly people, her whole life passed through her mind in images that were disconnected and yet connected by a thread that the mind could not grasp: her student years, *What Is To Be Done?*, secret meeting places, prison, the conversation with the young Frenchman about happiness, her husband and the bench in Montsouris park, shooting, the flags of October, school, Hugo's poems, the dark autumn night of nineteen forty-one, the train, the sleeping children and Seryozha—somewhere very far away, on a high mountain, with his kind, absent-minded smile. Nina Georgiyevna felt aware that this day was connected with her whole life, with her love, her struggle, her work. Tomorrow she will go to school again and see the children. . . . No doubt Vasya will come home soon. He has a wife and a son. Olechka is happy: Sinyakov had sent a telegram yesterday saying that he counted on being home in July. Olechka is expecting a baby. . . . Valya has made good. She will be a great actress, perhaps she will give expression to what was within Seryozha. . . . And I? . . . I have my school, my reminiscences, my people. . . . And Nina Georgiyevna looked around her with the young eyes of the student girl whose photograph Sergei had so fondly cherished. But her heart throbbed—it was too full of both grief and happiness. She put her arm around a little girl who was standing next to her—only to this innocent child could she speak about her youth, about Seryozha, and about the people; and she expressed all this in the one word that swept through the vast square like the wind: "Victory." . . .

Natasha went to the Red Square too, with little Vaska; later they visited Nina Georgiyevna. Everything was so unusual that Natasha thought to herself: it's like a dream. . . . When she returned home she found a letter from her father. Her neighbour said: "An airman brought it."

Dmitri Alexeyevich wrote:

"MY DEAR NATASHA,

"I have just been told that the Germans have signed the preliminaries in Reims and that they will fly here tomorrow. So it is all over, and the first thing I do is write to you. My dear, darling daughter, I congratulate you, I know what you have gone through during these years, you have been brave, you have worked, who can say that this is not our common victory? I recall just now how you came from Minsk and said at once that you wanted to go to the front; it is not important that you were not at the front long, everybody fought in this war. My heart aches at the thought that Mama did not live to see this day; one can live all one's life and not know such happiness. Just think of what has happened—victory! I am living in a small house near Berlin, some colt lived here, he has a bathroom of a pistachio colour, and a set of the complete works of Doctor Goebbels. No, I don't want to think about them now, I want to think about our people, our good, brave people, who are true to their hearts and to their destiny.

"No doubt Vasya will be home soon. I have been told that he is in Berlin, I looked for him, but it is a perfect Babel here, he was seen, however, after the surrender, so everything is all right. For three years, whenever I thought of you my heart stood still, although you said nothing about it in your letters, I knew what you were feeling. I feel calm about you now. I had a long talk with Vasya, he is a real man, you were only a girl, but you were not mistaken. He does not make a striking impression at first sight, perhaps, but the better you know him, the more you appreciate him. We have not lived through these frightful years for nothing, you will be happy with him. How I would like to have a look at my grandson! Please, don't scold him for being a shouter—he must shout sometimes, especially if he has character. For all you know, he may move mountains, invent things that we don't dream of.

"You are wrong in worrying about me. Age is merely a convention, in nineteen forty-one I must have been somewhere near seventy, what with the terrible things that went on then, but now I can dance, and I could make your admirers green with envy. You say I ought to go to Kislovodsk, but that's no place for me. There will be lots of work to do, the soldiers have done their share of fighting, now the busy time is starting for us fellows. Apart from the fact that the wounded have to be put on their feet, the healthy will begin to fall sick—it's always like that

after a great strain. You needn't worry, I'll do my bit, I'll find strength enough for that.

"I can imagine what will happen in Moscow tomorrow, or the day after. I am sorry I will not be there to see, I saw the capture of Berlin, and there was still some shooting somewhere today—but it was the last. Postwar silence reigns here now. It must be noisy in Moscow, though. I am fed up with the Germans, I long to be in Moscow, I want to walk down the Gogol Boulevard and hear some nipper like your Vaska caterwauling. Kiss him for me, kiss everybody. Go to the Red Square for me, and if you see Stalin, take a good look at him, he is a great man. And just give my greetings to all the houses, big and small.

"Natashka! We have lived through it!"

Natasha's eyes had the tap on today—because of Nina Georgiyevna, because of all she had seen in the streets and in the hospital. After reading her father's letter she burst into tears: she recalled how her mother had said shortly before death: "I think everything will change soon"—that had been before Stalingrad. . . . Then Natasha recalled that Nina Georgiyevna had spoken about happiness earlier in the day, she said "Seryozha" but did not finish the sentence. . . . Papa must be ill, you can feel that, he will never admit it himself, he will be as restless as this to the end of his life. And Natasha meditated on her father's life: he rose before her eyes—big, exuberant, alive, she had never seen a man more alive than he. . . . He says that Vaska may move mountains, but he himself moves mountains without inventions, it is simply that the people around him change, and it is he who infects them. . . . I would like to live like that, sometimes I feel that he is younger than I, that's what strength of heart means. . . .

Natasha gave Vaska his supper and wanted to put him to bed, but he strongly objected; he made her understand that he would not go to sleep because there was to be a salute tonight of "a fousand guns," and suddenly he fell asleep, in his clothes—he was tired. Natasha undressed him, but he remained fast asleep. Natasha thought: how heavy he is! I won't be able to lift him soon. . . .

While Vasya was in the aeroplane he calculated how long it had been—nearly four years; in days, it would be over a thousand—he lost count. But the longest of all, it seemed to him, were the moments during which he drove from the aerodrome to Kropotkin Street. The car crept along—all the streets were packed with people. Vasya looked but did not see—he did not distinguish either the houses or the streets. He skipped up the stairs like a young boy, and when he entered the room and saw Natasha, he could not speak, he could not even step towards her, he stood stock-still by the door. She ran to him, cried out "Vasya!" and also stood still. They remained in a long embrace. Then Natasha under-

Good—there was no need to say anything. She got busy: took Vasya to the bathroom, filled the bath, and then put the kettle on the gas stove. All this she did mechanically, while tears trickled from her eyes.

"Don't think I'm a crybaby, Vasya. I'm only like this today.... I didn't cry when I had no news from you. It was hard for me in the daytime, but at night I dreamed of you...."

"And I dreamed of you when I was in the forest.... Natasha...."

He could not speak, but he had to repeat that word "Natasha." He kissed her and could not tear himself away; guns crashed, the sky was ablaze with lights, but he kept kissing her face, her hands, and repeating: "Natasha."

Suddenly Vaska woke up. He jumped up and shouted "boom" in echo of the salute, and then, looking frightened, he enquired:

"Mum, who's 'at uncle?..."

Vasya wanted to take him in his arms, but he ran away, stood in his long nightshirt rubbing his eyes and smiling shyly.

"Silly boy—it's Papa. Big Vaska."

Vaska said distrustfully:

"Is 'at Papa? No.... Papa's like zis...."

He made motions with his arms to show that his Papa was taller, and fat. But when Vasya laughed he climbed on to his knees and in a businesslike way began to pull off his epaulettes.

"Lyonya's papa's a general. He's fat. Did you shoot cannons today? We were in the Red Square. They threw a man up. He's somebody's papa. Did they throw you up?"

He fell asleep in his father's lap. Natasha put him to bed.

Searchlights raced across the sky like sunbeams. High up, through the clouds, a shining red flag suddenly appeared.... And down below the crowds cheered.

Vasya kissed Natasha. Suddenly he tore himself away and thought: like it was in Minsk.... What happened between these two nights?...

He looked at Natasha. How beautiful she has grown! And she is different.... Perhaps we have gone mad and want to revive the past?... Why, four years have passed. She has lived a different life. I am a stranger to her....

And at his side Natasha also thought of the same thing: of the potency of time, of severance. Vasya made her feel uneasy—he is not the same, he is so stern.... Perhaps they will understand each other, but many, many days will be required for that....

An hour passed. It was still dark. But they already knew that they did not need long explanations, or tests of mutual feelings—they had found each other. Had recognized each other's lips, the birth mark, the smile and thoughts.

"Do you know why it is so easy, Natasha? Because we have been together all the time, I know that now...."

"But why don't you tell me about it? Do you think I will not understand?"

"No. I know you will understand. I will tell you.... Later.... Something ended today. I thought about it in the aeroplane.... It will be the tenth of May tomorrow, an ordinary day, perhaps nothing in life will change. But everything will change. Do you think I can forget these years? Never! Neither the people, nor the forests, nor the heartache. But just now I am thinking about something else: what's going to be tomorrow?... Perhaps things will be very hard, I don't know; but I do know this—we will be together. You will have your trees, or wheat ears, I will have my houses. From the outside it may seem that nothing has changed, but actually, everything has changed. Did I kiss you like this in Minsk? I did not even know that it was possible to kiss like this.... We are both different now. There is a poem by Lermontov in which people loved, died, met in the next world and didn't recognize each other. We have now met in another life; the past one has gone, but we have recognized each other...."

"When you were in encirclement I wrote to you, talked with you."

"I felt it. That is why we recognized each other. When we parted we were children. Now we have a son. I am not the same, and you are different.... But I love you more than ever before...."

"Vasya!... Vasenka!..."

"They say a wind blows up a big fire...."

"Love?"

"Everything—love, life, and the people.... While I was in the aeroplane I thought: how big the people have grown! Their grief, their pride, and the path they have traversed...."

They went to the window. Day was breaking. The streets were deserted. The rosy dawn struck the houses. And it was very quiet, except for the sparrows that were chirruping in the neighbouring garden. How unusual that quiet was—after the storm, after the salvos, cheers and tears. Neither of them could speak. They did not even look at each other now; they stood side by side. Vasya held Natasha's hand in his own big, hot hand. They gazed at the rose-tinted houses, at the exceedingly bright, big sky, or perhaps they were not looking, but listening to the profound silence of the morn. And suddenly they both started: somebody laughed merrily—little Vaska had woken up.

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